The Thesis Committee for Shannon Nicole Hicks
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Reality TV's "Queen of All:"
Genre, Transgression, and Hierarchy
In *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Dana Cloud

Barry Brummett

Reality TV's "Queen of All:"
Genre, Transgression, and Hierarchy
In *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

by

Shannon Nicole Hicks, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2014

Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor, Dana Cloud, for her excellent guidance in directing this thesis. Her unwavering support enables and inspires me to be a better scholar, activist, and person. Many thanks are also due to my distinguished reader, Barry Brummett, whose thoughtful suggestions for revising my work will surely make reading it more enjoyable for others. I would also like to thank Joshua Gunn for his charitable interest in this project and mentorship throughout the writing process. I am privileged—perhaps even spoiled—to count myself among the students of such brilliant and generous scholars. Likewise, I thank many of my fellow graduate students in Communication Studies who gave freely of their time and patience in talking "Honey Boo Boo" with me at all hours of the day and night. Finally, I cannot adequately express how thankful I am to my parents for encouraging me to go after my dreams, and to my son for giving me the strength I need to do so: "Without you, nothing."

Abstract

Reality TV's "Queen of All:"
Genre, Transgression, and Hierarchy
In *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

Shannon Nicole Hicks, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Dana Cloud

This thesis examines the reality television (RTV) series *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (*HCHBB*) as a rhetorical text in and through which the cultural significance of race, class, and gender stereotypes—and the meanings they hold for different individuals and groups—are actively contested and negotiated. I argue that recurrent themes of symbolic transgression of hierarchical structures in *HCHBB* operate as a modality through which cast and audience(s) alike might make or interpret potentially subversive/resistant meanings. This focus on the RTV series as a dynamic site for making and contesting meaning—rather than a static text encoded/decoded by members of the discrete categories of producers and consumers—enables critical attention to the discursive and affective elements at work in *HCHBB* without forsaking analysis of the political and material frames in which they circulate. These frames are explored throughout a brief history of the RTV genre and an overview of the scholarship that has engaged it. Ultimately, I argue that while *HCHBB* and the genre of RTV may potentially provide the

opportunity to challenge class antagonism and discrimination, it also perpetuates structural, material inequality. By linking themes of symbolic transgression as they operate in and through the text with Kenneth Burke's (1969) analysis of hierarchy and mystification of class relations, I show how *HCHBB* doubly participates in the stratification of economic class when symbolic transgression is offered as an affront to social class morality rather than pervasive structural, material inequality. Despite an ethos of rebellion against bourgeois norms, *HCHBB* displaces rather than cultivates critical class consciousness by encouraging performances of redneck identity which also consign the Shannon/Thompson family to their fate as working class celebrities.

Table of Contents

Introduction

On June 12, 2014, The Pew Research Center released the results of a landmark study—the largest ever conducted by the nonpartisan think tank—on political polarization in America. The survey of 10,000 American adults examined not only the growing polarization of the political realm, which is "arguably the defining feature of early 21st century American politics," but also its impact on other aspects of society as well. The results, unfortunately, are not very surprising. The survey found that:

> Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan acrimony is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in recent history. And these trends manifest themselves in myriad ways, both in politics and in everyday life.[1]

Indeed, ours is an era in which such political stalemates have led to a weeks-long government shutdown. Decades-long struggles for equality have been won and decades-old victories for equality have been overturned. Unprecedented scientific and technological advancements continue alongside the needless return of nearly eradicated and deadly communicable diseases. Wars over abortion rights, gun control, immigration reform, health care, marriage equality, government surveillance, the minimum wage, public education, and international conflicts—to name but a few—have been fought with growing animosity and disregard for democratic deliberation. And in the wake of the so-called "Great Recession," economic stratification has continued to climb, separating even the wealthiest 0.01 and 0.1 percent of Americans from their

[1] Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization in the American Public," last modified June 12 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

peers in the top 1 percent, and to whom the remaining 99 percent of society stands in stark relief.[2]

At the dawn of a millennium fraught by such economic, political, and social instability, it should come as no surprise that we remain divided over one of the latest and most ubiquitous popular culture phenomena: reality television.[3] The explosion of reality programming in the Twenty First century has irrevocably altered both the media landscape and the television industry. While these programs made up roughly 20 percent of all prime time programs in 2001, by 2010 that percentage had doubled to 40 percent and has continued to grow.[4] The genre is so well established that RTV shows can now be categorized by popular sub-genres like the docusop, gamedoc, reality dating show, reality sitcoms, and more. Indeed, the Academy of Television Arts has modified its Emmy Award categories three times since 2001 to reflect the diversification of reality formats.[5] While the genre is dauntingly broad, and reality shows have cycled through—and recycled—many televisual formats and popular trends, America's current obsession has taken the RTV world by storm: we just can't seem to get enough "rednecks." But what some have celebrated as "cable's blue collar boom," many others have deemed a sign of the coming apocalypse.[6]

---

[2] Annie Lowery, "The Wealth Gap in America is Growing, Too," *The New York Times*, April 2 2014, http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/the-wealth-gap-is-growing-too/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

[3] The genre term "reality television" is hereafter abbreviated as "RTV," excepting its use in directly quoted sources, in situations where abbreviation might create confusion, or where the full term is better suited to its analysis.

[4] Aaron Barnhart, "How Reality TV Took Over Prime Time," *Broadcasting & Cable*, Vol. 140 Issue 36 (2010): 4.

[5] Wikipedia, "Reality Television," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reality_television, (Accessed June 15 2014).

[6] Kyleen James, "Redneck TV: 'Honey Boo Boo,' 'Ducky Dynasty,' and Cable's Blue Collar Boom," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 15 2013, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/redneck-tv-honey-boo-boo-408551.

Although the reception of RTV and its latest fixation—"redneck reality"—has suffered from the same polarization that seems to afflict all of contemporary society, a quick scroll through the cable menu confirms that "the demand for redneck reality has reached a fever pitch."[7] And in the words of one of RTV's youngest and most infamous stars, America had "better redneck-ognize!"[8] This is but one of the signature catchphrases of Alana Thompson, a southern beauty pageant princess originally discovered on the popular and controversial reality show *Toddlers and Tiaras*.[9] The show followed young children and their families across America and into the hotel ballrooms and high school auditoriums where they compete for the first place title, "Ultimate Grand Supreme." Today, Alana is better known as the star of her own RTV show, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*.[10] The series offers a glimpse into the lives of now seven-year-old Alana and her self-proclaimed "redneck" family, from their modest home in McIntyre, Georgia to the pageant stage and everywhere between. Currently in its third season and despite its popularity (*HCHBB* is second in popularity only to ratings-powerhouse *Duck Dynasty,*[11] an aptly named RTV show that also depicts redneck family-life), *HCHBB* has been widely criticized in the media and is often singled out as the epitome of social and cultural decay. For example, an entire episode of the animated cartoon series *South Park* was dedicated to satirizing *HCHBB*, mocking the Shannon/Thompson family's obesity and contemplating whether the metaphorical "bar" of society could possibly go any lower.[12] On the other hand, audiences have found much

[7] Mike Spies, "'Rednecks,' TV's Last Bastion of Prejudice," *Vocativ*, August 28 2013, http://www.vocativ.com/usa/uncategorized/redneck-reality-tv-fuels-americas-last-acceptable-form-of-racism/.
[8] Alana Thompson, "What is a Door Nut?" 22 August 2012 episode of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, (TLC), TV.
[9] *Toddlers and Tiaras*, (TLC/Authentic Entertainment, 2008-2013) TV.
[10] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, (Authentic Entertainment/TLC, 2012-present), TV.
[11] *Duck Dynasty*, (Gurney Productions/A&E, 2012-present), TV.
[12] "Raising the Bar," 3 October 2012 episode of *South Park*, (Braniff Productions/Comedy Central), TV.

to love about the show, which is often praised for being genuine and relatable in its display of unwavering family support. Persistent ambivalence towards *HCHBB*, the manner in which the show invokes the cultural stereotype of the "redneck," and its place within the genre of RTV reflect ongoing anxieties about life in the 21st Century.

Thesis Overview

As a text, the show *HCHBB* participates in the complex signification of multiple possible meanings to multiple possible audiences. Media and RTV scholars have theorized the different "reading positions" from which audiences interpret the show and the specific mechanisms or modalities through which they are negotiated. The show also borrows from multiple genres, drawing various elements of documentary, sitcom, vaudeville, and burlesque into its performance of "reality." Indeed, Andrejevic (2004) argues that this fundamental hybridity is the distinguishing feature of RTV as a genre.[13] *HCHBB* also exists in conversation with larger discourses about race, class, gender, and family. Popular culture texts like *HCHBB* are always more than just seemingly mindless forms of entertainment—rather, they active sites of symbolic production, negotiation, and subversion. As Gramsci argued, "Knowing is never a passive reflection of the given but an act creating the mediations necessary to direct life."[14] The complex texts of RTV provide one resource for such mediation.

In understanding *HCHBB*, it is impossible to isolate the show from its context within the RTV genre or from the historical, ideological, and material structures in which both are grounded. My analysis takes an historical materialist perspective in tracing the operation of

[13] Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: the work of being watched* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 69.
[14] James Martin, *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 450.

discursive ideologies and affect in and through *HCHBB* as they work to both resist and perpetuate the material structures that ensure the profitability of RTV for cable networks and advertisers. As Bryan McCann (2007) observes, historical materialism "locates issues of power within the broader context of a capitalist society, seeking to understand how different forms of oppression work in tandem to reify class relations and determine the conditions of possibility for intervention."[15] This attention to structural oppression is crucial in the study of RTV.

Following an introduction to redneck RTV in the 21st Century, my first chapter provides a brief history of the RTV genre and an overview of the scholarship that has engaged it. In this chapter I challenge the use in thinking of RTV as a coherent genre, arguing that questions about the truth or authenticity of claims to represent "reality" often distract viewers and critics alike from the role that these popular texts play in propping up particular political economies, including that of the media industry. The second chapter offers an analysis of symbolic transgression in *HCHBB* through application of Stallybrass & White's (1986) extension of Bahktin's analytic category of the "carnivalesque."[16] Here, I argue that transgression in *HCHBB* functions as a modality in and through which cast and audience may engage potentially subversive or resistant meanings, even as the latter emerge from a high/low binary structure that often reinforces the norms and values they challenge. This method enables critical attention to discursive and affective elements at work in *HCHBB* without forsaking analysis of the material frames in which they circulate.

---

[15] Bryan McCann, "Therapeutic and Material <Victim> hood: Ideology and the Struggle for Meaning in the Illinois Death Penalty Controversy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2007): 383.
[16] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

The third and final chapter explores both the show *HCHBB* and the genre of RTV for the ways in which each challenges and/or perpetuates social class antagonism and structural, material inequality by linking transgression as it operates in and through the text with Kenneth Burke's (1969) concept of hierarchy and the mystification of class relations.[17] In building on the analyses set out in the first two chapters, I argue that the show doubly participates in the stratification of economic class: Symbolic transgression as an affront to social class morality—rather than structures of material inequality—displaces rather than cultivates critical class consciousness –encouraging instead performances of redneck identity which consign the Shannon/Thompson family to their fate as working class celebrities. The performances of Alana Thompson and her family on *HCHBB* may have earned "Honey Boo Boo" her self-proclaimed title, "Queen of All" RTV, yet perfecting an essentially debased cultural form leaves this "redneck" family socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged.

Here Comes the Hillbilly

Although the terms "redneck" and "hillbilly" are not synonymous, the terms are often conflated. For the purposes of this paper, the conceptual overlap in these designations outweighs their distinctions. Both are used in varying contexts to indicate white, working or lower class Americans originating/living in parts of Appalachia and/or the south east US and who may be classed as "Other" in relation to normative traits/characteristics of race or class.[18] In addition, references in popular media to "redneck reality" programming usually lumps both groups together. For these reasons, RTV programs claiming to feature both "rednecks" and

[17] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
[18] For more information on these terms, their origins, and their relevance in modern America, see: Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

"hillbillies" are discussed as participating in the "redneck reality" sub-genre. Indeed, both terms continue to inspire identification and to captivate media audiences.

In 2002, CBS television announced plans to capitalize on the success of their abidingly popular sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies* by creating a reality television spinoff, predictably titled *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*.[19] The premise of the reality show mirrored the original by relocating a multi-generational clan from the hollers to a posh Beverly Hills mansion. In response, cries of discrimination and exploitation echoed through the Appalachian hills and were underscored by the protest of casting calls in the mountainous regions of Arkansas, North Carolina, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.[20] Gerry Roll, Executive Director of the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, condemned the network's plan: "Evidently, CBS's CEO Les Moonves thinks families who have struggled with poverty for generations and overcome obstacles for survival that would make most urban Americans cringe is good comedy."[21] Roll's defense of hillbillies as stalwart despite a history of abjection is an attempt to valorize their struggle against the presumption of urban privilege—but it also exemplifies the historical process of negotiating hillbilly culture and values in response to their criticism in dominant, hegemonic discourse.[22]

This frequent juxtaposition in popular culture of upper- and middle class wealth with lower- or working class penury has fascinated media scholars and historians. In *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, popular culture and history scholar Anthony Harkins (2004)

---

[19] Max Grinnell, "Struggle to Keep 'The Real Beverly Hillbillies' Off the Air Continues," *Scout Archives*, 2003, https://scout.wisc.edu/archives/r16979/struggle_to_keep_the_real_beverly_hillbillies_off_the_air_continues.

[20] Meg James, "'Beverly Hillbillies'? CBS Has Struck Crude Oil, Appalachia Says," *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 February 2003, http://www.commondreams.org/headlines.shtml?/headlines03/0211-03.htm.

[21] Gerry Roll, "The Truth About 'The Real Beverly Hillbillies,'" *Leadership for a Changing World*, http://www.leadershipforchange.org/program/press/docs/OpEd-Roll.php.

[22] Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

argues that "[t]he key to the 'hillbilly's' surprising ubiquity and endurance from 1900 to the dawn of the third millennium has been the fundamental ambiguity of the meaning of this term and image."[23] His history of the hillbilly traces the negotiations and evolutions of the term and its meaning through competing media representations and offers valuable insight as to why "ideological and graphic constructs of poor and working-class southern whites," like stereotypes of the hillbilly, redneck, and even "white trash," are still relevant in the 21st Century.[24] According to Harkins, while the hillbilly is "[c]onsistently used by middle-class economic interests to denigrate working-class southern whites (whether from the mountains or not) and to define the benefits of advanced civilization through negative counterexample, the term and idea have also been used to challenge the generally unquestioned acceptance and legitimacy of 'modernity' and 'progress.'"[25] In the aggregate, these challenges have taken aim at the economic, political, and cultural institutions which shape the lives of those in Appalachia and the American South. Today this tug-of-war over the symbolism and significance of the poor, white "Other" is most notably seen taking place on the stage of RTV.

While criticism of *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* may have contributed to CBS's decision to cancel plans for the program, it certainly didn't put a stop to representations of hillbillies and rednecks in the blossoming genre of RTV—Moonves was just ahead of his time. The "Great Recession" of the late-2000's, which officially began in 2007, was looming on the horizon when RTV's attention shifted from shows like *The Real World, Big Brother, and Survivor* to an emerging fascination with blue-collar professions. The Economic Policy Institute (2013) reports that even prior to the recession, "[t]he business cycle expansion from 2001 to 2007 was the

[23] Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 3.
[24] Ibid, 5.
[25] Ibid, 5.

weakest on record for job growth and was the first business cycle on record where median household incomes did not grow,…[while] the income of the typical working-age household dropped by $2,180."[26] As this report points out, the median income of working-age households was at a millennium-low when in 2005, just prior to the rise and fall of the housing bubble, the *Discovery Channel* debuted two reality shows centered on America's working-class.

In *Dirty Jobs*, workers "taught" host Mike Rowe how to perform their self-proclaimed "dirty jobs."[27] The show always opened with a shot of Rowe, often knee-deep in filth, saying:

> My name's Mike Rowe, and this is my job. I explore the country looking for people who aren't afraid to get dirty — hard-working men and women who earn an honest living doing the kinds of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us. Now, get ready to get dirty.[28]

This juxtaposition of an "honest" day's dirty work with what we can only assume are "dishonest" jobs of so-called "civilization" was the theme of many television programs in the mid- to late-2000s. In *Deadliest Catch*, for example, camera crews braved the Bering Sea to film King Crab fishermen in one of the most dangerous jobs in the US.[29] The show is a humongous success and is currently airing its 10th season.[30] The late 2000's saw the proliferation of these "blue-collar reality" programs, many of them featuring dangerous forms of manual labor in remote or harsh environments, like *Ice Road Truckers*,[31] *Ax Men*,[32] and *Black Gold*.[33] This fascination with the

---

[26] Bivens, Fieldhouse, & Shierholz, "Freefall to Stagnation," *The Economic Policy Institute*, 14 February 2013, http://www.epi.org/publication/bp355-five-years-after-start-of-great-recession/, 5.
[27] *Dirty Jobs*, (Discovery Channel, 2006-2012), TV.
[28] *Wikipedia*, "Dirty Jobs," Last Modified 15 July 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_Jobs.
[29] *Deadliest Catch*, (Discovery Channel, 2005-present), TV.
[30] Incidentally, the show *Deadliest Catch* is narrated by Mike Rowe, former host of *Dirty Jobs*.
[31] *Ice Road Truckers*, (History Channel, 2007-present), TV.
[32] *Ax Men*, (History Channel, 2008-present) TV.
[33] *Black Gold*, (truTV, 2008-present), TV.

working class hasn't abated in the years since the recession's official end in 2009. After a modest recovery from 2009-2010, "GDP growth decelerated to 1.5 percent for 2012 and 2.0 percent for 2011, down from 2.4 percent in 2010 and 2.7 percent in the last six months of 2009 (the first half-year of official recovery)."[34] Bivens et al. (2013) argue that the government's premature return to budget austerity crippled states' ability to maintain programs of public support.[35] Thus, the continued effects of the recession were passed onto the tax payers—but money wasn't all that Americans had to worry about.

Along with increasing attention to race relations since the inauguration of our first Black president, this decade has seen fierce battles over abortion, gay marriage, immigration, healthcare, voter rights, gun control, international conflicts, and government surveillance. Political parties have remained deadlocked over these and other issues, and the increasing polarization of political discourse in general has left many Americans with deep anxieties about the future that extend beyond the realm of the economic into the worlds of politics, media, and culture. According to Harkins (2004), "The hillbilly image/identity reached its apex during the Great Depression and blossomed across the cultural spectrum…In an era of economic and social upheaval, the 'hillbilly' represented both fears of societal collapse and devolution and a celebration of indigenous American folk and folk culture."[36] This may be one reason why RTV has seen a surge of not just blue collar America, but the white working classes of the American South.

Reality Goes South

[34] Bivens, et al., "Freefall," 10.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 220.

In the last four years, RTV has seen a surge of southern shows like *Duck Dynasty*, *Hillbilly Handfishing*,[37] *American Hoggers*,[38] *My Big Redneck Wedding*,[39] *My Big Redneck Vacation*,[40] *My Big Redneck Family*,[41] *Myrtle Manor,*[42] *Gator Boys,*[43] *The Legend of Shelby the Swamp Man*,[44] *Swamp People,*[45] *Call of the Wildman*,[46] *American Pickers*,[47] *Mudcats*,[48] *Bayou Billionaires*,[49] *Pit Bulls and Parolees*,[50] *Moonshiners*,[51] *Hollywood Hillbillies*,[52] *Cajun Pawn Stars*,[53] *Country Fried Home Videos,*[54] *Mountain Monsters,*[55] *Billy the Exterminator,*[56] *Redneck Island*,[57] *Deep South Paranormal*,[58] *Glamour Belles*,[59] *Only in America with Larry the Cable Guy*,[60] *Hillbilly Blood*,[61] *Rocket City Rednecks*,[62] *Sweet Home Alabama*,[63] *The Shed*,[64] *Big Tips Texas*,[65] *Bamazon*,[66] *Lizard*

[37] *Hillbilly Handfishin*, (Animal Planet, 2011-2012) TV.
[38] *American Hoggers*, (A&E, 2011-present), TV.
[39] *My Big Fat Redneck Wedding*, (Country Music Television, 2008-present), TV.
[40] *My Big Fat Redneck Vacation*, (Country Music Television, 2012-2013), TV.
[41] *My Big Redneck Family*, (Country Music Television, 2014-present), TV.
[42] *Myrtle Manor*, (TLC, 2013-present), TV.
[43] *Gator Boys*, (Animal Planet, 2012-present), TV.
[44] *The Legend of Shelby the Swamp Man*, (History Channel, 2013-present), TV.
[45] *Swamp People*, (History Channel, 2010-present), TV.
[46] *Call of the Wildman*, (Animal Planet, 2011-present), TV.
[47] *American Pickers*, (History Channel, 2010-present), TV.
[48] *Mudcats*, (National Geographic Channel, 2012-present), TV.
[49] *Bayou Billionaires*, (Country Music Television, 2012-present), TV.
[50] *Pit Bulls and Parolees*, (Animal Planet, 2009-present), TV.
[51] *Moonshiners*, (Discovery Channel, 2011-present), TV.
[52] *Hollywood Hillbillies*, (Reelz Channel, 2014-present), TV.
[53] *Cajun Pawn Stars*, (History Channel, 2012-2013), TV.
[54] *Country Fried Home Videos*, (Country Music Channel, 2006-present), TV.
[55] *Mountain Monsters*, (Destination America, 2013-present), TV.
[56] *Billy the Exterminator*, (A&E, 2009-2012), TV.
[57] *Redneck Island*, (CMT, 2012-present), TV.
[58] *Deep South Paranormal*, (Syfy, 2013-2014), TV.
[59] *Glamour Belles*, (Lifetime, 2011), TV.
[60] *Only in America*, (History Channel, 2011-2013), TV.
[61] *Hillbilly Blood*, (Destination America, 2011-present), TV.
[62] *Rocket City Rednecks*, (National Geographic Channel, 2011-2013), TV.
[63] *Sweet Home Alabama*, (Country Music Television, 2011-present), TV.
[64] *The Shed*, (Food Network, 2013-present), TV.
[65] *Big Tips Texas*, (MTV, 2013-present), TV.
[66] *Bamazon*, (History Channel, 2012-present), TV.

Lick Towin',[67] *Small Town Security*,[68] *Backyard Oil*,[69] *Party Down South*,[70] and *Buckwild*,[71] among others. The" redneck" has become a mainstay of RTV, hypnotizing audiences across the US with a rendering of the English language so foreign that it apparently warrants the use of subtitles. For many viewers and critics, the genre has become little more than exploitative cultural and class tourism, highlighting the differences between rural America and the rest of the "civilized" world. As one critic put it: "Call it rubbernecking, or shame watching…redneck reality-television shows are a sort of travel channel for the cultural elite."[72] While the explosion of redneck RTV has generated important conversations about class, race, gender, religion, politics, and culture, it has often resulted in the demonization of rednecks as the underbelly of society.

Among dozens of shows that depict various ways of living off the land and maintaining all manner of southern traditions in the face of modernization, the greatest controversy has come in the form of a pudgy, pre-pubescent pageant princess demanding to be "red-neck-ognized!"[73] The antics of Alana Thompson, better known by her nickname "Honey Boo Boo," piqued the interests of the *TLC* audience that watched her as a six-year-old child beauty pageant contestant on the hit RTV show *Toddlers and Tiaras*, and a spinoff was born.[74] The first season of *HCHBB* debuted in the fall of 2012 to an international audience of more than two million viewers, and the show's fourth episode managed to attract an audience of three million on the

[67] *Lizard Lick Towing*, (truTV, 2011-present), TV.
[68] *Small Town Security*, (AMC, 2012-present), TV.
[69] *Backyard Oil*, (Discovery Channel, 2013-present), TV.
[70] *Party Down South*, (Country Music Television, 2014-present), TV.
[71] *Buckwild*, (MTV, 2013), TV.
[72] Tricia Romano, "'Ducky Dynasty,' 'Buckwild, 'Honey Boo Boo,' and the 99 Percent," *The Daily Beast*, 13 December 2012, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/13/duck-dynasty-buckwild-honey-boo-boo-and-the-99-percent.html.
[73] Transcription by the author unless otherwise noted; all errors sic.
[74] Toddlers and Tiaras, (TLC, 2008-2013), TV.

night of the 2012 Republican National Convention.[75] Voted "Best Redneck Series" in Channel Guide Magazine's 2013 Viewers Voice Awards in their annual reader poll, the show continues to draw a large audience.[76] Alana was even named one of the 2012's most interesting people by Barbara Walters, saying of the show, "It'll make you smile."[77] This fascination of American RTV audiences with child-star and pageant princess "Honey Boo Boo," the relationships between members of her blended family, and their performances of race, class, and gender is the subject of the chapters that follow.

[75] Sheila Marikar, "'Honey Boo Boo' Ratings Top RNC's," *ABC News*, 31 August 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/08/honey-boo-boos-ratings-beat-out-the-rncs/.
[76] *Channel Guide Magazine*, "2013 Channel Guide Magazine Viewer Voice Award Winners," 21 October 2013, http://www.channelguidemagblog.com/index.php/2013/10/21/2013-channel-guide-magazine-viewers-voice-award-winners/.
[77] Erin Carlson, "Barbara Walters Defends Honey Boo Boo 'Most Fascinating' Selection," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 4 December 2012, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/barbara-walters-defends-honey-boo-397599.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Reality Television and Genre

Origins of RTV

The modern incarnation of reality television is decades in the making. The so-called "first wave" of RTV came from "a place where popular culture and social science overlapped, via a realist ideal in which social norms, mechanisms of conformity, ritualized scripts, and modes of interaction were put on display."[78] Using an "observational documentary model," filmmakers from varying backgrounds prized the aesthetic quality of true-to-life forms, often relying on the use of concealed cameras to capture their subjects in their so-called "natural" activities. As McCarthy (2004) argues, contemporary fascination with realistic, unscripted television can be traced to Allen Funt, who is often hailed as "reality TV's creative ancestor." Funt's 1940s "social experiment," *The Candid Microphone*, recorded what were essentially prank calls to his unsuspecting victims.[79] According to Nadis (2007), "In provoking these unrehearsed responses, Funt thought of himself as a researcher, conducting experiments in human nature; in his sketches he dared his victims to act badly and dared his audiences to consider what 'acting badly' meant."[80] Such techniques stirred the pot of traditional observational forms, provoking the desired—albeit, unscripted—responses to be captured by stealth.

Funt eventually refined these methods and transformed them into the TV program *Candid Camera*, filmed sporadically until his death in 1999.[81] The show was both timely and prophetic. As Nadis points out, "[c]oncerns about privacy, conformity, decency, and American

[78] Anna McCarthy, "'Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me': Postwar Social Science and the 'First Wave' of Reality TV," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 26.
[79] Fred Nadis, "Citizen Funt: Surveillance as Cold War Entertainment," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* Volume 37.2 (Fall 2007), 12.
[80] Ibid., 11.
[81] Ibid.

character were rampant in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Funt's shows emerged on radio and television."[82] In her study of television culture as it developed during the years following World War II, Lynn Spigel (1992) notes that by 1955, two thirds of American households had television, and by 1960, that figure was nearly 90 percent.[83] This rapid explosion intensified the general ambivalence towards the function of television in relation to gender roles, family life, and ideals of domesticity.[84] As she argues: "The 1950s was a decade that invested an enormous amount of cultural capital in the ability to form a family and live out a set of highly structured gender and generational roles…promising practical benefits like security and stability to people who had witnessed the shocks and social dislocations of the previous two decades."[85] Thus, the utopian dream that television might prove to be "a catalyst for renewed domestic values" existed alongside and in tension with dystopian nightmares of the mental, physical, and relational effects it might have on the family.[86]

Such a reaction to the invasion of televisions into the private domestic sphere is anything but new.[87] Spigel notes that conflicted responses in popular discourse to TVs potential impact on society and the family align with the reception of nearly all technological developments that modified, restructured, or enhanced extant means of communication.[88] The suburban enclaves of domesticity to which television was primarily marketed as the ultimate "home entertainment machine" were idealized private spheres that saw the new medium as

[82] Nadis, "Citizen Funt," 13.
[83] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.
[84] Ibid, 2.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid, 3.
[88] Ibid.

both a purveyor of purifying discourses and, conversely, of contagious social disease.[89] "At the same time, states were intervening to transform families. With the development of nationally regulated economies, they sought to regulate the way the family helped to produce a work force and to control the effects on families of fluctuations in the economy."[90] Thus, the development of television markets evolved alongside the shifting boundaries between public and private, an economic and cultural oscillation often inflected in early televisual programs. It should come as no surprise, then, that *Candid Camera* tapped into these cultural anxieties.

The show sought to showcase the workaday lives of normal Americans in order to "expose the mechanisms, behaviors, and rituals of everyday interaction.[91] McCarthy explains: "A product of the quiet liberalism of the 1950s, *Candid Camera* was made at a time when boundary-probing entertainment was still expected to have uplift…[and] sought to expose both the nobility and the folly in the lives of their subjects."[92] Funt's knack for capturing unscripted subjects, coupled with his goal to represent them in an uplifting manner, led him to produce the candid film *Children of the U.N* as part of the 1954-1955 season of *Omnimbus*, "the Ford Foundation's prestigious arts and culture variety program…designed to appeal to 'minority taste groups' with edifying presentations of learning and artistic genius."[93] That the man hailed as the father of RTV produced both a reality gag show *and* an educational reality documentary of sorts during television's initial foray into the lives of postwar families speaks to the breadth of its experimental forms as well as their overlap. Modern criticisms that dramatic elements embraced by the genre of RTV have now permeated documentary styles "downplays the long-

[89] Spigel, *Make Room*, 1992.
[90] Michael Shapiro, "The Politics of the Family," in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 278.
[91] McCarthy, "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me," 30-31.
[92] Ibid., 25.
[93] Ibid., 23-24.

standing difficulty of defining the documentary as a coherent genre…while it also ignores the extent to which television genres have always been negotiated on an intertextual level, in relation to surrounding program culture."[94]

The shared history of the traditional documentary and RTV is perhaps most evident in the fact that "social scientists continue to serve as consultants for reality TV to this day."[95] The early use of "fly-on-the-wall" and "hidden camera" observational formats, while often deployed in the name of artistic, social, or scientific advancements, initiated a host of (still ongoing) conversations about the ethical implications of such "artificial surveillance" projects.[96] Funt's films served as inspiration for the dramatic or performative aspects of Stanley Milgram's now infamous study on deference to authority.[97] Milgram's fascination with "theatricality" in scientific experimentation even led him to produce a documentary, *Obediance* (1965), from secret footage of the experiment—the likes of which continues to haunt high school psychology classes today.[98] Ironically, it seems as though the "authority" of film (especially that belonging to the "realist" style) to reveal objectively the operation of authority (facilitated, of course, through carefully contrived scenarios) went unchallenged by Milgram and Funt.

Importantly, both men felt that their innovations would precipitate ameliorative social change.[99] Nadis (2007) quotes Funt in a telling explanation of the purpose behind his programs:

> These are the plain everyday kind of people you never see in the headlines or in the movies or on the stage; authors create copies of them; history counts them and sorts

[94] Su Holmes, "Reality TV and 'Ordinary' People: Re-visiting Celebrity, Performance and Authenticity," In *Trans-Reality Television: The Transgression of Reality, Genre, Politics and Audience*, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2010), 113.
[95] McCarthy, "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me," 26.
[96] Ibid., 19.
[97] Ibid., 36.
[98] Ibid., 36.
[99] Nadis, "Citizen Funt," 2007; McCarthy, "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me," 2004.

> them and finally lumps them all together. They have no single name except as Americans and their voice is not remembered except as a chorus. They make themselves heard here as individuals…unposed, unrehearsed, and completely off-guard.[100]

Funt's belief that recording the behavior of his victims under various situational provocations could lead them to a purposeful statement of identity and individuality is still operational in contemporary genres of RTV. This belief was also evident in Funt's orientation towards producing reality television—his conviction that unabashedly voyeuristic projects which probed "the realms of realism and secrecy" were consistent with what was seen at the time as "the end of privacy" underscores the fundamental contradictions of privacy in a capitalist, consumer economy: if the achievement of middle-class status is contingent on both the performance of normative social identities and the conspicuous consumption necessary to such performance, both publicity and disclosure are necessary.[101] Thus, the project of candidly capturing private citizens not only anticipated the modern erosion of public and private boundaries, but also the equation of consumption with agency and civic participation. Rather than asking viewers "What do you have to hide?" Funt's programs instead hinted that hiding was not only futile, but also incompatible with the goal of social mobility in the postwar period.

Over time, the development of other programs tested the potential popularity of an unscripted genre. Kompare (2009) explains that the 1973 PBS documentary *An American Family*—which followed the everyday life of the Loud family over a year's time—was a source of

[100] Nadis, "Citizen Funt," 19.
[101] Ibid., 20.

both fascination and anxiety for American audiences.[102] The show was largely seen as "a manipulative sociological experiment in perpetual surveillance."[103] Despite the instability of the public/private dichotomy, Americans in the 1970's had yet to witness the coming revolutions in digital technologies and social media or the role they would play in making such surveillance practically ubiquitous at the turn of the 21st Century. Complicating matters further was the fact that *An American Family* aired on PBS, a public network known for featuring the sort of fact-oriented educational programs that were often contrasted with more commercially successful scripted formats.

A British version of the show, *The Family*, aired on the BBC. Reception of *The Family* was framed by British perceptions of the "excessive and intrusive values of American television and culture" represented by *An American Family* and the role it was thought to have played in dissolving the bonds of the Loud family. Interestingly, Holmes (2010) argues that contrary to retrospective assumptions, neither show was "perceived in relation to the heritage of nonfiction film" by popular audiences.[104] On the contrary, she says *The Family* elicited comparison to "other generic frames, principally those of soap opera and sitcom," fictional genres from which reality programming continues to draw.[105]

RTV and Genre Criticism

The relationship between documentary and RTV has been a significant focus of media scholars. The difficulty in disentangling their respective subjects, motives, methods, and audiences is not only traced back to their common ancestry, but also predicted in their future

[102] Derek Kompare, "Extraordinarily Ordinary: The Osbournes as 'An American Family,'" In *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
[103] Kompare, "Extraordinarily Ordinary," 2009.
[104] Holmes, "Reality TV and 'Ordinary People,'" 114.
[105] Ibid., 115.

relations from theorizations of the present moment. John Corner (2004) has described this present as a "post-documentary culture," a term often misunderstood or misapplied to genre analyses of RTV.[106] In clarifying his concept, Corner argues that his goal in coining the phrase,

> [W]as to indicate both the continuation of the documentary project and the quite significantly changed contexts of its production and reception. I mooted the idea of 'post-documentary' for the latter…because it seemed to me that there had been a decisive shift away from the old coordinates, aesthetic and sociological, which had variously worked to position documentary [and, I might add, sometimes a little precariously] as a specific project of recording the real…I also wanted to keep reality television articulated to elements of the documentary tradition and yet to signal the transformations…What it brings is essentially a revised set of values to television's 'real' and its 'factual,' together with quite pervasive new ways of looking and telling.[107]

Thus, Corner argues that rather than "killing-off" traditional documentary, as one of his critics put it, the descriptor "post-documentary" indicates that documentary will undoubtedly be changed—perhaps unrecognizably so—by the remapping of "reality" and the programs which lay claim to it.

The genre of RTV is dauntingly broad—so much so that its utility as an analytic frame may be questionable. As sub-genres of RTV have proliferated and sustained their popularity, the blanket term RTV has become somewhat akin to that of its dialectical counterpart, "scripted television." On one hand, both labels describe certain aspects of or assumptions about the programs they represent and categorically exclude others that do not belong. On the other, they

---

[106] John Corner, "Afterword: framing the new," in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2004).
[107] Corner, "Afterword," 297.

do little if anything to support a close reading of the connections between sub-genres or particular shows within them; nor do they to enable the identification of non-conforming shows as deviations, innovations, or emerging sub-genres, since the wide nets they cast catches an equally wide array of televisual formats and styles. Indeed, while Holmes and Jermyn (2004) claim that "it is perhaps only possible to suggest that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as 'Reality TV' is primarily its discursive, visual, and technological claim to 'the real'",[108] others have contested even this basic claim, arguing that—despite its name—the genre either makes no claim to represent reality or that "savvy" audiences are well aware of its artifice.

The trouble in defining the genre is rooted in "the concept of generic hybridity in Reality TV, its relationship with the history and status of documentary form and, just as crucially, issues of theoretical, critical, and methodological approach involved in the study of this field."[109] Thus, the various definitions of RTV often highlight the aspects of a particular RTV program or sub-genre which foreground relevant questions or suggest the specific methodological approaches related to one's own theoretical and/or disciplinary commitments. The advantage of such an approach is that it resists an oversimplification of the deep cultural significance of RTV, both in its broad strokes and fine details. A notable disadvantage, however, is the confusion generated by the proliferation of generic definitions—some of which seem to be irreconcilable. However, as different as these understandings of RTV may be, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Indeed, the inability for media scholars to agree upon even a basic definitional framework indicates the genre's complexity, and thus, the complex manner in which it is

[108] Holmes and Jermyn, *Understanding Reality Television*, 5.
[109] Ibid., 2.

understood, negotiated, and contested by producers, audiences, and critics alike.[110] According to Sonia Foss (2009) the genre critic tries "to understand rhetorical practices in different time periods and in different places by discerning the similarities in rhetorical situations and the rhetoric constructed in response to them."[111] Yet the genre does not prescribe the nature of the text, nor does an explicit rhetorical situation always necessitate the authorial construction of a generic response. As Gunn (2004) argues, "Genres reside in the collective, mental space of a community or audience, and assume a content within a given context."[112] Thus, genre exists as a naming of a shared but largely unconscious bias towards form, and the content of that form becomes a specific text. Such an approach to genre permits the textual critic to attend to the complexities of generic expectation and fulfillment without prescribing the nature of the text.

We have already seen how RTV is often defined in terms of its generic heritage. For some, an allegiance to particular constructions of the genre's origins is the basis of a normative standard. Murray argues that

> [t]he types of reality programs that share the most textual and aesthetic characteristics with documentaries tend to focus on the everyday lives of their subjects in somewhat 'natural' settings without a game setup, use cinema verite techniques, and do not contain flagrantly commercial elements such as product placement or the promise of prizes.[113]

In describing certain conventions of RTV sub-genres as extraneous or "flagrantly commercial," this definition can be seen to contain a prescription, if not necessarily a mandate, for generic

[110] Whether or not producers, audiences, and critics form discrete or overlapping categories is an important distinction explored in Chapter 1.
[111] Sonja Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, (IL: Waveland Press, 2009), 137.
[112] Josh Gunn, "The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the return of political demonology," *Western Journal of Communication*, (68:1, 2004), 6.
[113] Murray, 67.

piety. For Corner (2009), the genre of RTV defined by the very generic mutation to which Murray objects. In his view, RTV "is a changing and increasingly hybridized set of practices, forms, and functions, one in which both cultural and commodity values lie most often in the right blend of the familiar and the new, of fulfilled expectation and shock."[114] In underscoring the ways in which RTV is valued, Corner defines production and reception as fundamental to the form. Thus, while Murray recommends allegiance to RTV's generic lineage, Corner explains why such an allegiance is not a commercially viable strategy. This tension between the motives of RTV producers and the needs of its consumers is a recurring theme in studies of RTV which draws attention to the tenuous nature of these divisions.

For others, form and function are deployed in the service of the genre's foundational claim that it reveals or represents reality. According to Van Bauwel (2010), RTV "can be conceptualized as a narrative form in contemporary modernity in which the storytelling is embedded in the truth claims, and the conception of reality is linked to the visual and to the notion of authenticity. It is this specific representation of authenticity which seeks to tell us stories about 'real' identities—often represented in everyday life settings."[115] She maintains a critical distance from the concept of an "empirical reality" which might serve as the ground for these "truth claims," opting instead to tether the "real" to its guarantor, authenticity. Judgments of authenticity are more flexible, contingent, and normative than tests of "objective reality." Nevertheless, the authority of authenticity itself is predicated on its proximity to the "reality" in which it participates and for which it is an acceptable substitute. In much the same way, Deery (2004) sees the diversity of RTV programming united in "the genre's core brand

[114] Corner, 2009, 44.
[115] Sophie Van Bauwel and Nico Carpentier, *Trans-Reality Television: The Transgression of Reality, Genre, Politics, and Audience*, (UK: Lexington Books, 2010), 26.

identity—a special *access* to 'reality.'"[116] While the nature of that access obviously merits further scrutiny, it certainly seems logical that the epistemological claim to reveal or to (re)present reality, as the label "RTV" suggests, is foundational to the genre. On the other hand, what might seem like the lowest common denominator among otherwise incredibly diverse shows—the claim to represent reality—is, in fact, hotly contested.

Many scholars contest the transparency of meaning behind RTV's reality claim. What seems self-evident in the description "reality television" may well be the result of giving greater weight to "reality" than to "television." In other words, the grammatical assumption that "reality" modifies "television" obscures the possibility that "television" may in fact modify "reality" in vitally important ways. Accordingly, Dubrofsky (2009) understands "the term 'RTV' to mean the filming of real people over time with the aim of developing a narrative about their activities segmented into serial episodes…that are unscripted, though most have a specific structure."[117] This pragmatic definition highlights the "reality" of RTV as "a constructed fiction, like the action on scripted shows," only with "real people" rather than actors and "based on access to 'reality' (footage of real situations*)* without suggesting that they are 'reality.'"[118] In other words, Dubrofsky argues for a definition of RTV which makes no claim to represent any reality other than that which is carefully selected and edited from much larger segments of footage in order to tell a compelling story. In this way, she builds Andrejevic's (2004) concept of the "savvy" RTV consumer—who sees through the promise of reality to the reality of

[116] June Deery, "Reality TV as Advertainment," *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, (Volume 2, Issue 1, 2004).
[117] Rachel Dubrofsky, "Fallen Women in Reality TV: A Pornography of Emotion," *Feminist Media Studies*, (Volume 9, Issue 3, 2009), 354.
[118] Dubrofsky, "Fallen Women," 354.

contrivance—into its very definition.[119] Whether or not the claim to reality is taken seriously by RTV audiences, it remains a central focus of critical inquiry—and not without reason.

Likewise, Cloud (2010) argues that RTV audiences accepting the "irony bribe" are able to simultaneously maintain both earnest investment and ironic detachment from reality programming that features plot contrivance, mitigating the tension between reality and fantasy from the "winking, playful distance" that permits them to enjoy what, in the case of the Bachelor, is blatantly sexist material.[120] Thus, the reality TV genre is uniquely evocative of the modality of transgression, operating at the boundaries of reality and spectacle, public and private, acceptable and unacceptable.

The claim to reality, however it might be interpreted by media critics, is also interpreted by RTV audiences. The role of the audience in understanding, negotiating, and/or contesting representations in reality programming is both important and potentially difficult to ascertain. Audience analysis lies outside of the scope of the present study; however, many RTV scholars have undertaken just such a task. And while some fault audiences for being passive and uncritical in their reception of RTV messages, others point to active audiences engaged with the truth, meaning, and value of those messages. Deery (2004) argues that RTV reflects and catalyzes such cultural negotiations: "Although reality TV is itself an amalgam of earlier forms…it capitalizes on current negotiations between what is public and viewable and what is private and closed to outside view, succeeding best when it manages to forcibly exteriorize the interior." In the same way, other scholars cite the resistive potential inherent in the form of RTV. Van Bauwel argues that because "[w]e are shown identities that are seen as deviant but within the

[119] Andrejevic, *The Work of Being Watched*, 2004.
[120] Dana Cloud, "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment in *The Bachelor*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (27.5: 2010): 413-37.

margins, sometimes represented in a novel way…Reality TV can be seen as a *resistance strategy* pushing the limits of identities."[121] These perspectives are rather optimistic appraisals of the agency available for RTV cast members and audiences in what is a thoroughly commercialized, significantly mainstreamed media format that dominates coveted primetime positions.

Although such optimism seems to border on naivety, to refuse the possibility of such agency risks a fall down the slippery slope of determinism. In estimating the potential for the kinds of resistance Van Bauwel imagines, Horkheimer and Adorno do not mince words:

> It is still possible to make one's way in entertainment, if one is not too obstinate about one's own concerns, and proves appropriately pliable. Anyone who resists can only survive by fitting in. Once his particular brand of deviation from the norm has been noted by the industry, he belongs to it as does the land-reformer to capitalism.[122]

This view completely displaces the agency of the RTV cast, locating it instead in the ruthless and automated operation of the "culture industry." While complete resignation to the triumph of the capitalist machine may be ethically dubious[123] and—more pragmatically—disadvantageous in RTV criticism[124], the sentiment reflects legitimate concerns over the power of hegemonic systems to assimilate and appropriate strategies of resistance. Not only is the "culture industry"

[121] Van Bauwel, 2010, 26.
[122] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).
[123] Any schema of determinism ultimately faces serious ethical dilemmas. In depriving humans of their ability to act, to create meaning, and to otherwise intervene in the world, determinists likewise deprive us of the very capacity from which all ethical systems arise: if we cannot act (in all senses of the word, including symbolic action), if our actions are meaningless, or if they inevitably fail to effect the changes they intend, then acting ethically is equally impossible.
[124] Thus, criticism of determining systems would be futile.

adept at neutralizing such threats, it thrives on converting subversion into a profitable, mainstream commodity.[125] Is this the inevitable fate—or perhaps the present reality—of RTV?

The Struggle for Reality

It should be clear that media scholars remain divided on the potential of the RTV genre to serve as a democratic public in/through which its creators, casts, and consumers can negotiate that which it represents. As this overview has suggested, the broad range of programming covered by the umbrella of RTV prevent even definitional consensus—let alone critical consensus—on reality shows. Fortunately, the diversity of approaches to RTV criticism by media scholars of differing disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological commitments brings the strengths of each to bear on the spectrum of reality shows it addresses. At the end of the day, one thing that unites these approaches to RTV is that each proclaims RTV's ability "to spark fierce reactions in audiences, commentators, journalists and bloggers across various sectors of the media sphere."[126] In the following chapter, I explore symbolic transgression in *HCHBB* as not only one source of such controversy, but also as a point of engagement between the show's cast, producers, and audiences and its meaning as a rhetorical text.

[125] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972.
[126] Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, *Reacting to reality television: performance, audience and value*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

Chapter 2: Symbolic Transgression in *HCHBB*

Introduction

The title sequence of *HCHBB* fades in to a country home with white siding, a shed out back, and a red pickup truck. The camera pans down toward the gravel driveway and pauses on a family, standing together and smiling as if for a photograph. Alana waves regally from under her bedazzled pageant crown, a tranquil guitar melody plays, and somewhere, a dog barks in the distance. Then, quite suddenly, the tranquility is shattered: Momma June loudly passes gas, her family erupts in protest, and the music morphs into a twangy banjo riff. A graphic frame is then superimposed on this squabbling scene and set against a wood paneled wall, where it hangs for a moment before shifting and falling to the floor. Audible arguments give way to the sound effects of shattering glass and, finally, a squealing pig. The audience is left with the words "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo" in big, bubbled letters by way of introduction to the show and its stars.

This introduction to the Shannon/Thompsons[127] literally frames the family as deviant. The picturesque image of the family, the countryside, and the softly barking dog (a disembodied sound effect, despite the fact that the family's dog can be seen in the background) suggest an idyllic, rural domesticity. The camera descends critically from somewhere above, passing over the Shannon/Thompson home before ultimately centering on its occupants. Noticeably, the shot pans all the way down to the eye level of its shortest star and the show's namesake. Both the camera angle and the family's spatial arrangement suggest that the show will focus on Alana and her mother, who occupy the front and center of the shot. By focusing tightly on the family and providing only the softest background music, the viewer is presented with a scene notable

[127] This somewhat clunky designation—commonly used in media coverage of the program—indicates the entire cast of *HCHBB*, which includes family members with both surnames.

for its aesthetic simplicity. What's more, the Shannon/Thompson clan is made utterly accessible through their apparent proximity—not only do they occupy the entire visual frame, but they are positioned to seem within arm's length of the cameraman and, by extension, the viewing audience. Between the rural scenery, the eclipsing of physical distance, and the lack of digital production techniques that one might expect from such prime time television, the title sequence seems to present an ordinary southern family, casually composed for their entry into the public eye.

But barely a moment[128] passes before the crude sound effect of flatulence—attributed to Momma June—disrupts the scene, transforming it from calm into chaos. As the momentary composure dissolves, our focus on Alana is lost to the wailing of her older sisters and their defensive mother. This shift is audibly emphasized when the strumming guitar accompaniment screeches to a halt before being remixed into a plucky banjo tune. Only then does the scene drop back from its unadorned full frame, an image dignified by an ethos of transparency—perhaps even honesty—to be digitally "framed" and wall-mounted. The image of dysfunction is graphically emphasized over and against the one of composure which preceded it. But the commotion dislodges the portrait and sends it falling to the floor, where the sound of shattering glass completes the painfully literal metaphor. This introduction to *HCHBB* presents its stars as lacking the self-control necessary to sustain even the momentary semblance of propriety that a family must summon for such occasions as a family portrait. Gillian (2004) argues that "[t]he typical sitcom family photo carries with it the authority of the assumption of what a typical American family should look like."[129] In this respect, while the Shannon/Thompsons exceed the

[128] From beginning to end, the opening sequence is only 10 seconds long.
[129] Gillian, 2004, 67.

normative "family frame" invoked often in sitcoms, their unruly bodies are easily folded into the world of RTV, with its chintzy digital effects and unapologetic framing.

The title sequence of *HCHBB* has already accomplished a great deal of ideological framing for its audience by invoking not only an idealized pastoral landscape and southern "family values," but also their violation by stereotypical "rednecks." According to bell hooks (2009),

> Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening.[130]

The use of the digital picture frame and its subsequent shattering offers two stereotypes, then: both that of an idealized family—one worthy of framing and, hence, the dignity of representation—and that of an undisciplined, deviant family. The cultural figure of the redneck provides the perfect stereotype for such a projection of class anxieties.

Such symbolic transgression is aptly illustrated by the Renaissance carnival, which ritually violated symbolic hierarchies in "a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled."[131] Stallybrass and White (1986) explore the political and cultural significance of this "world upside down" in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*.[132] They argue that "the primary site of contradiction, the site of conflicting desires and mutually incompatible representation, is

[130] bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, 26.
[131] Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 8.
[132] Ibid., 4.

undoubtedly the 'low.'"[133] While the Renaissance fair ritually enacted the inversion of symbolic hierarchies to challenge the dominant or hegemonic orders that structured the lives of Renaissance Europe, the same principals can be observed today in both the genre of RTV in general and the text of *HCHBB* in particular.

Public Modalities, Public Screens

In the previous chapter, I traced the history and criticism of RTV, outlining the fundamental ambiguity that the genre represents in a rapidly evolving technological society. The following analysis will identify the symbolic transgression in three overarching themes of the show: the Pig, the Body, and the Family. In each domain, transgression operates as a modality through which the cast, the audience, and even the show's producers can critically engage the discourses invoked. In situating *HCHBB* within the context of the RTV genre, I draw on Asen and Brower's (2010) theory of public modalities.[134] Shugart (2010) describes the advantages of a modalities approach:

> The very notion of 'modality' affords primacy to the process of engagement, an orientation that is endowed with very different assumptions, consequences, and implications than either a devices or vehicles approach (for dominant discourses) or resources (for resistive audiences) orientation—approaches that, while they do not belie the process of engagement, deemphasize if not implicitly dismiss them.[135]

Thus, the modality of transgression in *HCHBB* provides the rhetorical critic with a means of examining the use of ambivalent and contradictory symbols and practices in the show. It also

[133] Ibid., 4.
[134] Daniel Brouwer and Robert Asen. *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010).
[135] Shugart, 2010, 178.

provides the audience with a process through which they might engage and negotiate these meanings in relation to the genre of RTV and its significance in the public sphere.

Although Habermas offers a model of the public sphere as a space "carved out between the state and the private sphere, and a domain in which the public may hold the state accountable through 'rational-critical' debate," rhetorical theorists understand this model as a counter-factual norm more than a reality.[136] The modalities approach is unique in offering a theoretical model that implicates itself as a method which shapes the object it reveals:

> Modality's "manner" implicates practice and theory, referring both to ways that social actors engage others publicly and to ways that scholars study the process of public engagement. With respect to practice, modality illuminates the diverse range of processes through which individuals and groups engage each other, institutions, and their environment in creating, reformulating, and understanding social worlds.[137]

Through modalities, we find a method of studying the transgressive elements of *HCHBB* that simultaneously recognizes its object—transgression—as a process through which the show's various audiences are able to engage in the construction and negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, this method "reveals the extent to which political discourses are in constant flux, continually reconfiguring and recalibrating themselves in relation to each other at any given moment."[138] In short, modalities are both lock and key for understanding public discourses.

Yet acknowledging the limits of a modalities approach is, indeed, consistent with that approach. To that effect, Cloud (2004) agrees with Kevin DeLuca (2002) in warning us that

---

[136] Phil Ramsey, "Journalism, Deliberative Democracy and Government Communication." *Javnost-The Public 17.4* (2010: 81-96), 83.
[137] Brouwer and Asen, *Public Modalities*, 16.
[138] Shugart, 2010.

"media and politics are intertwined and that the 'public screen' has overshadowed more traditional deliberative public fora in which contending groups make arguments and engage in instrumental action toward concrete political outcomes."[139] The absence of the ideal, deliberative public sphere as described by Habermas should caution rhetorical critics from overly optimistic appraisals of the potential for new media formats to precipitate lasting social change or redistributive economic policies. Heeding this caution, I foreground the ways in which *HCHBB* and its genre strategically employ contradictory practices that generate audience polarization or ambivalence. The modality of transgression in *HCHBB* can be observed in the treatment of Alana's pet pig, the display and function of bodies, and the structure and discourse of family.

Symbolic Transgression

In the Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Stallybrass and White (1986) argue that traditional dichotomies, like public and private, are defined in contrast with one another: "Each extremity structures the other, depends upon and invades the other in certain historical moments, to carry political charge through aesthetic and moral polarities."[140] Because the tension between opposites is essential in structuring their meaning, boundary transgression becomes singularly meaningful in negotiating the terms of the two opposites. For Bahktin, this transgression is represented in the spirit of the carnivalesque, a "populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the 'high' culture."[141] According to Stallybrass and White, Bakhtin's carnival required established hierarchies of high and low, since "there is no unofficial expression without a prior official one or

[139] Cloud, "The Irony Bribe," 300.
[140] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 1986.
[141] Bahktin, quoted in Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 6.

its possibility."[142] This presents several problems for Bahktin, not the least of which is that the carnivalesque is essentially reduced to what Stamm (1982) describes as "the cheerful vulgarity of the powerless…used as a weapon against the pretense and hypocrisy of the powerful."[143] In other words, symbolically inverting an established hierarchic order is not, in and of itself, a resource for accessing the power which legitimates the inverted order.[144]

On the other hand, Stallybrass and White argue that there are undeniably powerful statements of resistance in the transgression of symbolic boundaries, "[f]or the classificatory body of a culture is always double, always structured in relation to its negation, its inverse."[145] The need to uphold these precarious dichotomies explains why "[w]hat is socially peripheral is often symbolically central."[146] We know this to be intuitively true of our symbolic existence. As Kathleen Stewart (2010) argues,

> The space beyond the pale demarcates an excess at a border and gives that border a charge. It posits a fearful negation that produces both the fixed certainty of a 'center' by dramatizing its boundaries, and an uncaptured excess that remains a latent threat and an emergent force. The space 'beyond the pale' takes on the valences of things half-realized and yet enduring and prolific; like the charge of the imagination itself, it indexes forces of generativity; it stands like a sign pointing to a 'something more' beyond the enclosures of self-discipline and 'centered' ways of life.[147]

---

[142] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 16.
[143] Stamm, quoted in Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 18.
[144] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 18.
[145] Ibid., 20.
[146] Babcock, quoted in Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 20.
[147] Kathleen Stewart, "Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares)," In *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 247-248.

In relation to this peripheral boundary, the "center" is reassured of its stability and security—indeed, it depends upon this distance. The "latent threat" which Stewart describes may be realized in the act of symbolic transgression of normative boundaries and traditional dichotomies.

The project of rehabilitating the carnivalesque leads Stallybrass and White to focus on the "grotesque body" as it stands in opposition to the closed, "classical body."[148] It is the physical embodiment of Stewart's land "beyond the pale," the unruly Other who both threatens and sustains the centrality of the classical body.[149] The grotesque body is characterized by its "impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentered or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth (what Mary Douglas calls 'matter out of place'), physical needs and pleasures of the 'lower bodily stratum,' materiality and parody."[150] In its very nature, the grotesque calls to mind the classical categories which exclude it; one cannot be "seen" without the other, in the same sense that "impurity" only exists in relation to "purity," and neither can be figured as such without the other as its ground. Yet the hybrid forms represented by the grotesque invoked a "logic" which "could unsettle 'given' social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion, and domination which structured the social ensemble."[151] As Stallybrass and White argue, these "points of antagonism, overlap and intersection between the high and the low, the classical and its 'Other,' provide some of the richest and most powerful

[148] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 22.
[149] Stewart, "Real American Dreams," 247.
[150] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 23.
[151] Ibid., 43.

symbolic dissonances in the culture," and many of them can be seen at work in the modalities of transgression in *HCHBB.*[152]

The Pig

The historical overview of RTV presented in my first chapter points out that the genre's development has always been intertwined with the changing natures of society, culture, and the market. As Andrejevic (2004) argues, "Reality TV emerged during a period in which the destabilization of mass society was accompanied by a reformulation of the boundaries that helped maintain its social and cultural hierarchy."[153] It should come as no surprise, then, that RTV has long been a cultural site when these boundaries are created, reinforced, and contested. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White (1986) argue that "amongst the menagerie of fairground creatures, it was undoubtedly the pig which occupied a focal symbolic place at the fair (and in the carnival)."[154] While the authors observe that the pig was often a symbol of abjection, of the "low," they cite Bahktin's observation that "the ambivalence of the pig" which made it so potent a symbol stemmed from its location "at the intersection of a number of important cultural and symbolic thresholds."[155] Thus, the pig was an ideal symbol of transgression, since "the pig, like the fair itself, had in the past been celebrated as well as reviled."[156]

In the second episode *HCHBB*, ("Gonna' Be a Glitz Pig") the Shannon/Thompson family anxiously awaits the arrival of a new family pet: "Glitzy" the teacup pig. To cheer Alana up after

[152] Ibid., 25.
[153] Andrejevic, *The Work of Being Watched*, 66.
[154] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 44.
[155] Ibid., 44-5.
[156] Ibid., 44.

a recent pageant loss, the family has decided to buy her the pet she has always wanted. Alana says, "I named my new pet Glitzy because I'm going to bring her to the glitz pageants and we're gonna' win it all." Finally we see Alana's father (Mike "Sugar Bear" Thompson) pull up to the house in his red pickup truck with the pig in tow. Sugar Bear introduces Glitzy in a direct-to-camera interview before entering the house:

> We made it home. This is a new member of our family. His name is Glitzy. I think Alana is going to love him. I think June is going to fall in love with him, too. We got Glitzy from a placed called Posh Pigs and they pretty up their pigs before sending them off with painted toenails and all. This is the pig leg. One side is painted purple; the other side is painted green.[157]

But he struggles to continue this line of thought as Glitzy squeals madly throughout the interview. At one point, Sugar Bear stops trying to talk over the raucous noise and waits for Glitzy to calm down. He then carries the pig, swaddled in a hot pink baby blanket, into the house to meet his new family, much like any proud parent would bring home a new baby (indeed, much like Anna brings home her new baby towards the end of the season).

The pig has a long and complicated relationship with humans. As anthropologist Edmund Leach points out, the many similarities between pigs and human babies makes the pig a particularly striking point of transgression between the human/animal binary:

> Not only did the pink pigmentation and apparent nakedness of the pig disturbingly resemble the flesh of European babies (thereby transgressing the man—animal opposition), but pigs were usually kept in peculiarly close proximity to the house and fed

[157] All transcriptions were conducted by the author unless otherwise specified. All errors sic.

> from the household's leftovers. In other words, pigs were almost, but not quite, members of the household.[158]

By describing Glitzy as part of the family and treating him as such, the Shannons/Thompsons transgress the animal/human binary in an explicit way. Indeed, the liminal nature of the pig confers upon the Shannon/Thompson clan the same ambiguous status. Notably, neither Momma June or Sugar Bear have any reservations about bringing a barnyard animal into their house. Momma June says, "The teacup piggy makes a great pet because it's only going to weigh five or six pounds." Although Sugar Bear concedes that "a pig is made to be an outside animal, not an inside [animal]," and acknowledges that pigs are an "unusual pet" during his interview, he insists that Glitzy is a member of the family because they intend to "show him love."

While the arrival of Glitzy the teacup pig at the Shannon/Thompson home is treated much like the arrival of a new baby, whether being swaddled and rocked or tucked into his "crib," many scenes in the first season of *HCHBB* highlighting the pig's lack of domestication and, hence, its animal nature. For example, in the episode "She Ooood Herself," Momma June has gathered the girls in the kitchen to weigh-in for their weight loss challenge. Alana is the last to be weighed, but when she steps off the scale, the girls begin shrieking in disgust as Glitzy begins to defecate on the dining table. In a to-camera interview outside in front of the railroad tracks (a frequent spot for filming such scenes), Alana concludes that "We put Glitzy on the table and, she oooo'd herself." The camera cuts back to Momma and the girls huddled around the table and screaming "Oh god! Ewww!" then jumps right into a sofa-confessional with the entire family. Jessica "Chubbs" says, "Momma said she was going to eat it but—" and Momma interrupts, "You are a liar! You were the one talkin' 'bout eatin' it!" Anna chimes in, "It looked like a hot dog

[158] Leach, quoted in Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 47.

to her! She wanted to eat it. A burnt hot dog!" Then Jessica wonders aloud, "What's that thing called? A chocolate éclair?" She seems lost in thought as to what kind of food would be most similar to Glitzy's feces.

This scene is significant for audiences and critics alike. While the girls have obviously been herded into the kitchen for the purpose of filming their diet challenge weigh-ins, the bodily functions of an animal are unscriptable. Both the defecation and the family's immediate reaction to it stand as "evidence" of the show's authenticity, which is constantly scrutinized. Allen and Mendick (2013) argue that the RTV audience takes pleasure in "construct[ing] authenticity by negotiating paradoxical elements, bringing together the realist and the artificial, to make distinctions between programs and people."[159] In this sense, audiences are active in producing the meanings associated with the RTV text through "…practices akin to detective work."[160] And in this scene, the proof is in the "oooo'ing." The fact that the feces itself is blurred out in the production process confirms the obscenity as real in the very act of its censorship.

The scene is also transgressive in several ways. Defecation in and of itself transgressive is a sign of the "open" body with leaking orifices. The fact that the pig as "animal" is defecating in a "human" space violates the human/animal binary. But more importantly, this act takes place on a kitchen table, itself a powerfully symbolic object. The table is where not just people but families gather to eat and commune with one another. It is elevated as a symbol of food, family, and the bonds which sustain them. Defecation, on the other hand, is a solitary act which represents the opposite end, both literally and figuratively, of both social communion and the process of eating. Glitzy's defecation on the Shannon/Thompsons' table thus transgresses the

[159] Allen and Mendick, 2013, 465.
[160] Allen and Mendick, 2013, 465.

strict separation of consumption/elimination and sociality/elimination. Furthermore, it invokes the ambiguity of the pig as both human companion and human food source—and the Shannon/Thompson family love pork. Indeed, the season two premier shows the family skin and process a pig that was killed by a car. As Sugar Bear does the dirty work, the girls run around and tape the deceased pig's tail on each other and Momma June.

Finally, in accusing Momma of the desire to consume the feces, the girls mean to compare her hearty appetite, and perhaps even her excessive weight (which was established moments earlier during the weigh-in as 303 pounds) to that of a pig. Yet the comparison is also a synthesis of both the human/animal and consumption/elimination transgressions. Stallybrass and White explain that the pig was often reviled for its "specific habits [including] its ability to digest its own and human feces as well as other 'garbage.'"[161] The show often depicts the family's food choices as both excessive and abject. Not only are they shown eating large amounts of food, especially at restaurants, and eating frequently (one of the girls is almost always eating during scenes shot inside the house), but the food itself often becomes the focus of the scene.

In the family's book, *How to Honey Boo Boo,* the chapter dedicated to June's cooking provides recipes for the show's most "infamous" meals, including "sketti," "roadkill barbeque," and the "GLT (Glitzy, Lettuce, and Tomato Sandwich)."[162] In the tone of "mock" derision that characterizes the book, Levesque writes "Okay, okay. We don't actually want you to use Glitzy! That would just be…wrong. It doesn't matter how redneckulous you are, it is still considered

[161] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 45.
[162] Levesque, Shannon/Thompson family, *How to Honey Boo Boo*, 2013.

rude to eat your pets."[163] But within the transgressive paradigm evident in the girls' jab at their mother, consumption of Glitzy would actually constitute cannibalism. Yet the audience need not reach that conclusion to engage the modality of transgression in understanding this scene. Importantly, as described above, the pig is ambiguous primarily in its similarities to humans and its proximity to them. Pigs are "threshold" animals in the sense that their value prompted humans to bring them into the safety of the household where they could also eat from the table scraps—yet they didn't belong in the home. By selecting a pig as Alana's pet and "best friend," the Shannon/Thompsons have transgressed the human/animal binary, and with every comparison elicited between them, the binary is destabilized, denaturalized, and decentered.

The Body

It is suggested several times throughout the first season of *HCHBB* that Alana bears a marked resemblance to her pet pig. Audiences are encouraged to connect her unruly, overweight body, undisciplined mannerisms, and apparent disregard for the cultural taboo of keeping pigs of any kind as household pets. In a typical example of just such a connection, Alana can be heard proclaiming "I like to get dirty like a pig!" as she bellyflops into a pool of mud in the show's debut episode, "This Is My Crazy Family." In a subsequent episode, "Sassified," the comparison between Alana and Glitzy is much more explicit. After trying on her glitz dress from the previous competitive season and finding that it is several sizes too small, Momma June takes Alana to get fitted for a new dress. Lacey, the owner and seamstress of the boutique, describes the challenges of measuring Alana: "Our stuff 99% of the time fits perfect, but with her not being just a typical skinny, skinny pageant child, I wanted to make sure everything fit just right…so normally I don't deal with a lot of pins." While Lacey is manipulating and pinning the

[163] Ibid., 58.

fabric, Alana complains loudly about being stuck with the pins, repeatedly gasping and shrieking with each poke. When the fitting is complete, Alana asks Lacey if she would be able to make a matching dress for Glitzy. She replies, “You want a dress for a pig? I can try. Is it going to squeal real loud when I try to measure it like you do?” Alana nods, and squealing Giltzy is brought in. After taking a few measurements, Lacey says, “I don’t know who would want a pig like that, so no more pigs.” Given the comparison that Lacey has made between Alana and Glitzy, it seems that “pig” carries a double signification here. Indeed, throughout the entire scene it remains difficult to distinguish whether Lacey is more offended by the pig or by Alana. She treats them the same, humoring and measuring them both for identical dresses that they will ultimately wear during the same competition. In a later interview about the fitting, Alana remarks, ““I don’t think Miss Lacey liked Glitzy. How can you not love Glitzy? It’s a pig!” This line might just as easily read, “How can you not love Honey Boo Boo? She’s a pig!” Exchanges like the one described here are less than subtle examples of how the show transgresses the boundary between human and animal and points towards the figuration of bodies as likewise transgressive.

The implicit and explicit comparisons between Alana and Glitzy are one way in which Alana’s body is figured as grotesque. Drawing on Bakhtin, Stallybrass and White describe the grotesque body as possessing “impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentered or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices, and symbolic filth (what Mary Douglas calls ‘matter out of place’), physical needs and pleasures of the ‘lower bodily

stratum', materiality and parody."[164] Alana is loud and boisterous, she is frequently pictured exposing and shaking her bulging stomach, and she is perfectly happy to don the costumes of pageantry and parade before a cheering/jeering audience of millions of viewers. Her disproportion is frequently the subject of discussion, as in the above example where Alana's ill-fitting clothes drive the plot of the episode. Regarding her weight, Alana remarks: "Momma says pretty comes in all different sizes. Mine is cute." June expresses ambivalence about her daughter's obesity: "Alana is short and chunky. I don't give a shit. I mean, I'm short and chunky. What the hell matters? It is what it is." Yet Alana's size remains a consistent concern of the show's critics. On the View, Joy Behar had this to say about her weight:

> What's little Honey Boo Boo going to grow up to be? That's what I want to know…She's going to be a fat kid; she's going to grow up to be a big fat woman. She is, I can tell. She's just a kid, but you see the genetics are right there. She's going to have large boob boobs -- Honey Boobs Boobs.[165]

Indeed, many viewers and critics alike express concern over the long-term health of Alana and her sisters, who are sometimes portrayed as innocent victims of June and Sugar Bear's failure to model healthy eating habits.

Early in the first season, June initiates a weight-loss challenge between her and three of her daughters (Anna, who is pregnant, is obviously excluded). The four women collectively weigh in at more than 700 pounds and would all undoubtedly be classified as either overweight or obese. Their weight poses several problems throughout the season, one of which is

---

[164] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 23.
[165] Zach Johnson, "Joy Behar: Honey Boo Boo Will 'Grow Up To Be A Big Fat Woman,'" *Celebrity News*, 7 September 2012, http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/joy-behar-honey-boo-boo-will-grow-up-to-be-a-big-fat-woman-201279.

discomfort during the extreme summer heat in Georgia. June concludes, “Heat and big people don’t mix. Period.” In response to the children’s complaints about the heat, June suggests that they create a “redneck waterslide” from a used tarp, baby oil, soap, and water. The girls take turns sliding and eventually begin to wrestle in the soapy grass and mud. While this is certainly an innovative and cost-effective way to cool off and have fun in the summer time, it also reiterates the comparison between the Thompson family and their beloved pig Glitzy. Stallybrass and White discuss the image of the pig as a purveyor of symbolic filth in relation to the actual practice of wallowing that pigs utilize to cool themselves off and protect their fragile skin.[166] June says “Rednecks take a bath, waterslide, and mud wrestle all at the same time.” By acknowledging and rejecting norms of both hygiene and general decorum, June offers a transgressive understanding of bodies and the discipline to which they are subjected.

In another key episode, the family attends a local event known as the “Redneck Games” where self-proclaimed rednecks compete in various events and demonstrate southern pride. After two of Alana’s sisters join her in a mud-hole belly-flop contest, she remarks, “I like to get dirty like a pig.” The audience sees a montage of the girls splashing into the mud and struggling to stand up. In another event, Pumpkin goes bobbing for raw pig feet in a plastic tub of water. June expresses her concern: “I thought the pig feet were kind of disgusting. I mean, I actually thought that they would be some kind of crookedness to it, but they were actually raw.” In the same breath, she adds: “I think she’ll do pretty good, I mean she’s competitive. Hopefully she just won’t get sick.” Such comments suggest that the rawness of the pig feet, not the activity of bobbing for them itself, is objectionable—yet the whole family cheers Pumpkin on as she competes.

[166] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 45.

Indeed, the image of Pumpkin with a severed pig's foot hanging out of her mouth is transgressive on many levels. Not only are the feet of an animal generally discarded instead of eaten when the animal is cooked, but raw meat—and pork especially—is known to sicken those who eat it. Although June recognizes the activity as both disgusting and potentially dangerous, she supports her daughter's choice to participate and encourages her to do her best. Taken together, these events draw explicit comparisons between Alana's family and the pig by highlighting that the two share behaviors that are both "dirty" and "disgusting." They also contribute to the figuration of the Thompsons' bodies as grotesque through intimate contact with symbolic filth.

Just as the filth that contaminates the Thompsons is both symbolic and literal, so their bodies are seen as grotesque both figuratively and literally. In an episode where the family is preparing for an upcoming glitz pageant, June takes her daughters to the local spa. June and Alana receive facials and the older girls receive pedicures for the first time. As the staff begin to work on Pumpkin's toes, the groups makes jokes about how dirty and rough her feet are. June admits, "The girls' feet…they're a hot mess." In a confessional interview with the whole family, Anna admonishes her sister for her "nasty" feet: "You better watch out, those things will cut you." Years of walking outside in bare feet have left Pumpkin's and her sisters' feet calloused and hard, yet they cannot compare to the state of June's "fork-lift foot." She refuses to ever remove her socks in front of anyone because of an injury she sustained while working in a factory. One staff member can barely conceal her disgust over the discussion: "I had not heard of forklift foot before. That was a first. Apparently it's when your foot gets run over by a forklift, and your toes are all mangled. I guess." Other spa patrons join the staff in questioning June about her "fork-lift foot," and some even beg for a peek at the deformity. Yet all seem

thoroughly appalled at the thought of the mangled toes, which are actually revealed later in the season when June is persuaded to remove her socks at a waterpark. The toe is indeed smashed and mangled, with a nail growing haphazardly out of an obviously infected and festering wound attended by gnats.

Interestingly, the public display of a literally grotesque body (or body part) comes only after June gives up her stubborn resistance to such visibility. The example of "fork-lift foot" transgresses the public/private dichotomy by bringing to light what would otherwise remain hidden from the public. June seems to have an extremely reflexive understanding of her own and others' visibility. A constant refrain for June in the show is, "Look, I ain't no Barbie doll, but I sure ain't the ugliest one in the world. Trust me, I've seen some jacked up people." While frequently acknowledging that her own body is framed as excessive and deviant, June attempts to contextualize her voluptuous form by pointing towards more egregious violators of societal standards of beauty. Such a strategy actively negotiates the norms of disciplining bodies and transgresses the division between the classical and the grotesque.

Later in the same episode, we see Alana and sister Pumpkin receive an etiquette lesson from Barbara Hickey, owner of the Etiquette School of Atlanta. June explains the reasons for arranging this visit: "When Alana didn't win anything at the pageant this past week, the judges said she needed to be more refined. What-the-hell-ever." Yet she earnestly invites Mrs. Hickey into her home, saying "They need a lot of work!" The ambivalence Mama and the girls display toward the middle class standards of "refinement" reflects the paradox of negotiating working class authenticity within a neoliberal society that imposes the imperative of self-improvement on RTV cast members. "RTV invites audiences to make moral judgments of working class

participants and, in so doing, position them as Other."[167] Mama June acknowledges this standard and appears to make an attempt to "refine" her daughters' manners by consulting an "expert."

On the other hand, Allen and Mendick's (2013) study of audience perception of class in reality game-doc shows revealed that "participants from working class backgrounds" generally "valued working class RTV contestants who had seemingly achieved fame and credibility because of their working class ordinariness."[168] Perhaps unsurprisingly, "loyalty to one's working-classness" was perceived as more authentic if the study participant valued such loyalty themselves.[169] Indeed, when combined with "the language of meritocracy and social mobility," participants even praised working class RTV stars for "exploitation of the celebrity machine."[170] In other words, the cast of *HCHBB* is confronted with the choice between performances of authenticity in two antithetical domains—that of the oppositional, working-class subject or that of the aspirational, middle class subject. In the next chapter, I will explore these negotiations of class in more depth; but recognizing how neoliberal and class ideologies shape and constrain performances of authenticity on RTV is essential in understanding how "failure" can represent transgression.

In a to-camera interview, the audience meets Barbara Hickey, owner of the Etiquette School of Atlanta. Notably, Atlanta is approximately 100 miles from the Shannon/Thompson home in Macon County; thus, the expert has traveled far to impart her civilizing wisdom on the uncivilized rednecks. As Mrs. Hickey approaches the house, Mama June, Alana, and Pumpkin—

[167] Allen and Mendick, 2013, 468.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 469.
[170] Ibid.

who is holding Glitzy—emerge to greet her. After asking rhetorically, “This is one of those… pet pigs?” she asks, “Is it a baby?” Although she is really asking whether Glitzy is a piglet or a fully grown pig, the question underscores the comparison between the family and their pet. It also works to create distance between Mrs. Hickey as a representative of civilized society and the ill-mannered rednecks, holding a swaddled pig as they stand barefoot on their front porch.

The scene cuts to a direct-to-camera interview with just Pumpkin, who protests: “My mama thinks I need etiquette classes. Look at me. I don’t need no etiquette classes. I don’t need manners or anything. What you see is what you get.” But what we see is an almost crazed Pumpkin, gasping between words as she chews something with gaping mouth, eyes darting wildly around her like those of a scared animal. During the lesson, Pumpkin rejects the need to conform to Mrs. Hickey’s expectations. She says, “I don’t care what people think of me. I am who I am and if you don’t like me, you don’t like me.” Mrs. Hickey condescendingly responds, “And… I hope that works for you.” While she is already visibly exasperated with the bickering between Alana and Pumpkin, the lesson in dining etiquette proves almost more than Mrs. Hickey can bear.

The cramped kitchen is lined with open shelving which houses Mama June’s stockpile of household goods: toilet paper, shampoo, laundry detergent, and paper towels acquired at rock-bottom prices through her habit of couponing. The shelves stacked high with brightly colored product containers contrast sharply with the well-dressed Mrs. Hickey with her fine tableware and linen napkins. During the lesson, Pumpkin asks questions like, “Is it rude to fart at the table?” Scandalized, Mrs. Hickey says, “Sometimes you might need to leave the table—” Pumpkin interrupts, “—you need to take a poo-poo or something.” After a moment of stunned silence, Mrs. Hickey says, “Well, you don’t say that.” She admonishes Pumpkin by saying, “We

never draw attention to ourselves!" This statement highlights the contradiction between standards of middle class propriety and working class authenticity in more ways than one.

Not only does Pumpkin's statement draw inappropriate attention to her bodily functions, demonstrating her desire to maintain an oppositional identity to dominant constructions of politeness, but Mrs. Hickey's insistence that well-mannered people "never draw attention" to themselves underscores the point (by missing it completely) that her appearance on the show, the lesson in etiquette, is designed to do just that. In calling attention to her bodily functions, whether blowing her nose, farting, or announcing that she needs to "take a poo-poo," Pumpkin performs the working class authenticity that is part of the show's appeal. When all is said and done, Mrs. Hickey concludes that the girls show "promise" and suggests that Alana might need another lesson in the future if she wants to win Miss America before snidely laughing to herself. In a direct-to-camera interview, Mama June points out that "Nobody can be proper and etiquettely all the time." She explains: "I think that she's what we call a square, and we're kinda' like a lopsided, obtuse, triangle, oval all put together. Like a, like a deformed shape." But if the "deformity" of the Shannon/Thompsons has crippled their social graces, Mama reasons, at least it hasn't made them into a family of "squares." Indeed, they laugh at the "tight ass" etiquette instructor as she gracefully exits, mumbling to herself, "OK, do I have my keys?"

This exchange marks one of the clearest examples of HCHBB talking directly back to dominant society or "high" culture as represented by Mrs. Hickey. Her "intervention," although solicited by Mama June, is reminiscent of another sub-genre of RTV: the make-over. As Andrejevic (2004) observes, make-over shows "diffuse and amplify the government of everyday life, utilizing the cultural power of television (and its convergence with new media) to evaluate

and guide the behaviors and routines of ordinary people, and, more importantly, to teach us how to perform these techniques on ourselves."[171] In this schema, RTV becomes a resource for neoliberal citizenship, modeling for us the dos and don'ts of life in the 21st Century.

If this imperative to "progress" or "improve" presents a paradox of authenticity for the working class RTV participant, it also presents what Allen and Mendick describe as the "paradox of identification" for the audience. In their study of audience members' negotiations of class through RTV, the authors observed this paradox when "people evaluated who is 'not like me' in order to reinforce their identity as 'ordinary,' 'normal,' and 'in the middle.'"[172] In essence, the audience may applaud the "transgressions" of RTV stars not for their defiance, but for the stability and neoliberal authenticity they provide to the viewers by way of negative identification. In this way, the imperative for the Shannon/Thompsons to learn their manners is lessened by the fact that in failing to do so, they make middle-class audiences feel better about their own identities.

The Family

Perhaps the most transgressive representation on *HCHBB* is that of the family. June Shannon has four children and one grandchild. Her common law husband of ten years, Mike "Sugar Bear" Thompson, is Alana's biological father, but also serves as a father figure for June's older girls and as grandfather figure for Anna's baby, Kaitlyn. June explains their relationship in a direct-to-camera interview:

> Sugar Bear is my baby daddy, that's Alana's dad. And we've been shack-em-up mates for like, eight years now. Sugar Bear is not the other girls' dad. They have other dads, but

[171] Andrejevic, *The Work of Being Watched*, 472.
[172] Allen and Mendick, 2013, 466.

they're not involved in the picture. Sugar Bear has asked me to marry him a few times…whoo, that 'M' word scares me, makes my flesh crawl.

The slang term "baby-daddy" is used to describe the biological father of a child, generally one who is no longer involved with the child's biological mother, and often (but not always) is absent from the child's life, or "not involved in the picture" as June says of Anna's daughter's father. Indeed, this is the only time in the entire first season where the older girls' biological fathers are mentioned. Until this point in the show, viewers are permitted to make their own assumptions about relationships within the family, quite unlike some other TLC shows where the structure of the family is a focal point of the plot or even spelled out directly in the show's introduction (*19 Kids and Counting*[173], for example). In his analysis of TV families, Kompare (2004) notes the pattern of "exploiting normative expectations" of viewers in RTV.[174] In *Extraordinarily Ordinary*, he argues that reality TV producers and stars alike aim at strategic violations of "normality" in their programming. June's use of the term "shack-em-up-mates" suggests a casual or temporary relationship between sexual partners, which both does and does not accurately describe June and Sugar Bear's relationship.

On the one hand, June expresses ambivalence about her relationship with Sugar Bear: "Relationships come and go, but my kids is forever." This sentiment inverts normative understandings of the family, where children are both the purpose and consequence of stable romantic partnerships. June employs a logic in which her romantic relationships are almost incidental to her relationships with her children. On the other hand, Sugar Bear has been in June's life for ten years and appears to be a stable, live-in partner that helps support June and

[173] *19 Kids and Counting*, (TLC, 2008-present), TV.
[174] Kompare, 2004.

all of her children. Alana says, “I know momma and Sugar Bear love each other so much, I don’t need a piece of paper to tell me that.” In the finale of *HCHBB’*s second season, June and Sugar Bear do have a “commitment ceremony,” but June still refuses traditional marriage. This clear rejection of state-sanctioned relationships flies directly in the face of heteronormative discourse of marriage and family. And while a couple may still have a traditional relationship without entering into a marriage contract, there are other ways in which the relationship between June and Sugar Bear is transgressive.

Momma June argues that her relationship with Sugar Bear began as primarily physical and only later evolved into the stable romantic partnership portrayed on the show. She says, “Was it love at first sight? No. Was it bed at first sight? Maybe. You got to try the milk out before you buy the cow.” The ambivalence of her commitment to Sugar Bear is also mirrored in her discussion of Anna’s pregnancy: “Anna’s baby’s daddy ain’t in the picture. You think that boy is gonna love and care about you? Negative. All that boy is wanting to get in your little biscuit, and get a little piece, and he’s runnin.’” This skepticism seems justified based the experiences of both Momma June and Anna (who delivers a baby girl at the end of the season), or at least what audiences knows of them. It also appears to inform June’s parenting strategy with Anna: “With my support and everybody’s support, I think Anna will do pretty good. But I’m not gonna totally raise it on my own. No. I think if you do the do, you do the time.” At no other point in the season is the father of Anna’s baby discussed, nor is she ever chastised for becoming pregnant by anyone in her family. Anna expresses guarded optimism about her own parenting skills: “I think I’m going to be an OK mom, but like, not like a ‘perfect’ mom. I’m going to be like, probably be like my mom.” Here Anna rejects the binary opposition of “good mom/bad mom” which so

often characterizes parenting discourse. Anna has followed in June's footsteps as a single, teenaged-mother and consequently aspires to be an "OK mom" as well.

Chapter 3: Queen of All

Introduction

The previous chapter began by analyzing the title sequence of *HCHBB* as a "frame" through which the Shannon/Thompson family is constructed as deviant—exceeding and transgressing the bounds of the heteronormative family. While Stallybrass and White's (1986) development of transgression as an analytic frame helps us understand its function as a modality through which meaning and identity are negotiated, it does little to explain the text's connection to broader social and economic structures. This chapter will build upon the concept of symbolic transgression by connecting it to the structuring hierarches of genre and the television industry. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke (1969) argues that the hierarchic motive is seen most clearly where a sense of "mystery" or irreconcilable difference is cultivated.[175] This hierarchy implies an "entelechy, which classifies a thing by conceiving of its kind according to the perfection (that is, finishedness) of which that kind is capable."[176] Thus, to say that a hierarchic motive underlies the text of *HCHBB* is to say that the show is understood primarily in relation to a particular hierarchy (or set of hierarchies) with a discernable "high" and corresponding "low" that bound it.

There are two competing hierarchies at work in structuring the text of HCHBB. First, the symbolic transgression discussed in the previous chapter is only intelligible in relation to the dominant social order, and this was obvious in the show's "push back" against polite, bourgeois society. Second, HCHBB is evaluated in relation to a hierarchy of redneck RTV, a genre form that is abjected as the lowest of the low. As others have argued, both fascination and anxiety accompany the fundamental ambiguity represented by the genre of RTV and its medium in an

[175] Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 223.
[176] Burke, *ROM,* 14.

advancing technological society. Ultimately I suggest that *HCHBB* is controversial in large part because it represents the entelechial zenith of the form of RTV.[177] Perfection in this sense is not my critical appraisal of the show; rather, the show achieves perfection in ascending to the top of a generic hierarchy which it then comes to symbolize. Yet the meta-structures in which the genre itself participates—those of the capitalist system of production and the neoliberal political economy—abject the redneck stars of RTV. The cast of *HCHBB* thus rises to the top of a symbolic hierarchy which is already inverted and, in so doing, perpetuates the "mystery" of class relations by reinforcing their distinctions.

Burke and the Principle of Hierarchy

According to Burke, "the magic of class relations" can be observed when a rhetorical object is figured primarily in relation to the very hierarchy it suggests.[178] He explains:

> Either elegant or filthy language can represent the hierarchic principle, just as both 'up' or 'down' represent the 'principle of height'…In this way, extremes can meet. To call a man very moral or to call him very immoral is at least 'the same' in the sense that, in both cases, one is saying, 'This man is to be considered exceptional from the standpoint of moral considerations'—and that is one of the purely 'grammatical' factors behind 'ambivalence' that might otherwise seem merely 'irrational.'[179]

The same dynamic is in play with Bahktin's concept of the carnivalesque. Of the grotesque body, Stallybrass and White (1986) say that "[t]he 'grotesque' here designates the marginal, the low and the outside from the perspective of a classical body situated as high, inside and central by

[177] Burke, *ROM*, 1969.
[178] Ibid., 223.
[179] Ibid., 258.

virtue of its very exclusions."[180] Thus, the opposition of classical to grotesque indicates the principle of hierarchy, since neither is meaningful without the other as its symbolic foil. While either can invoke a particular hierarchy or institution, and thereby mystify the relationships between its classifications:

> [T]he relative value of institutions depends pragmatically, Darwinistically, on their fitness to cope with the problems of production, distribution, and consumption that go with conditions peculiar to time and place. In other words, one particular order (or property structure), with its brands of 'mystery,' may be better suited than another for the prevailing circumstances.[181]

Thus, the most persuasive "mysteries" are those that address in some way the various social, cultural, economic, or political concerns of the day.

This thesis introduced the cultural figure or stereotype of the "redneck" in RTV as a means through which Americans have symbolically mediated their anxieties and ambivalences in times of great change. The popularity and endurance of redneck RTV testifies to the salience this mystery holds in the 21st Century. As the Pew Research Center's study on political polarization confirms, Americans seem at every turn to reach an impasse of some kind or another—an irredeemable difference which only unites us in opposition to the present threat.[182] In my exploration of RTV history and its development as a genre, I agreed with media scholars who argue that the ambiguity it represents makes RTV ideal as a modality through which American audiences can work out these anxieties. Here I will argue that public polarization and

---

[180] Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 23.
[181] Burke, *ROM*, 279.
[182] "Political Polarization in the American Public," Pew Research Center, last modified June 12 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

ambivalence in response to *HCHBB*—which is often singled out among both RTV in general and redneck RTV shows in particular—demonstrates that it not only invokes the hierarchic principle, but that it also represents the Burkian "perfection" of the RTV form.[183]

Through the specific symbolic transgressions represented by the pig, the body, and the family in HCHBB, as elaborated in the previous chapter, the rhetorical critic can observe how transgression itself operates as a modality not only for potentially subversive readings, but for fundamentally conservative ones as well. Burke notes,

> When a figure becomes the personification of some impersonal motive, the result is depersonalization. The person becomes the charismatic vessel of some 'absolute' substance. And when thus magically endowed, the person transcends his nature as an individual, becoming instead the image of the idea he stands for. He is then the representative not of himself but of the family or class substance with which he is identified. In this respect he becomes 'divine' (and his distinctive marks, such as his clothing, embody the same spirit)."[184]

Such has been the fate of Alana and the Shannon/Thompson family in the controversial world of RTV. Indeed, "Honey Boo Boo" has come to represent the entire genre and all that is ostensibly wrong with it. Criticism of the show often invokes the entire genre of RTV (and vice versa), and those lamenting the state of RTV often conclude that "The one that takes the cake is 'Honey Boo Boo.'"[185] Apocalyptic headlines read "Nuclear Option: The boo-boo of '*Here Comes Honey Boo*

[183] Burke, *ROM*, 1969.
[184] Ibid., 277.
[185] Theresa Elliott, "TV, pop culture have gone down the tubes," *Telegram & Gazette* (Massachusetts), 27 January 2014.

Boo.'"[186] Even fellow RTV stars have bashed the show. For example, musician and actor Adam Levine told GQ magazine shortly after the series debut:

> That show is literally The. Worst. Thing. That's. Ever. Happened. It's complete f****g ignorance and the most despicable way to treat your kids," he said. "F*** those people. You can put that in the magazine: F*** those idiots. They're just the worst. Sorry, I'm so sensitive to that — like, I don't know, man, it's upsetting. Just to clarify, I said, 'F*** THOSE PEOPLE.'[187]

While Levine may have been unusually obscene in voicing his opinion, the sentiment is shared by many. A LexisNexis search for "Honey Boo Boo" turns up 1,000 references to the show in print and online publications, many of which use the term to describe abstract cultural categories or phenomena, as does the ABC News headline, "American Moms Reject French Effort to Ban Honey Boo Boos"[188] (referring to child beauty pageants) and this *Washington Post* article, "…American popular culture revving up to its current Honey Boo Boo speed."[189]

Even the title of the official *HCHBB* book, *How to Honey Boo Boo: The Complete Guide on How to Redneckognize the Honey Boo Boo in You*, uses the star's nickname as an action verb, identity, and entire way of life.[190] Describing the Shannon/Thompsons as "America's loudest,

---

[186] Charles Hurt, "Nuclear Option: The Boo Boo of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*," *The Washington Times*, 27 August 2013, http://p.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/27/the-boo-boo-of-here-comes-honey-boo-boo/.
[187] Leigh Weingus, "Adam Levine Bashes 'Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,' Calls It 'Decay of Western Civilization,' *Huffpost TV*, 3 December 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/03/adam-levine-bashes-here-comes-honey-boo-boo_n_2231572.html.
[188] Susan Donaldson James, "American Moms Reject French Effort to Ban Honey Boo Boos," *ABC News*, 20 September 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/Health/american-moms-reject-french-effort-ban-honey-boo/story?id=20308890.
[189] Travis Nichols, "Shirley Temple Was Little Miss Economic Sunshine, Author Says," *The Washington Post*, 13 April 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-temple-was-little-miss-economic-sunshine-author-says/2014/04/10/ec1e7772-ba75-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08_story.html.
[190] Levesque, Shannon/Thompson Family, *How to Honey Boo Boo*, xviii.

gassiest, funniest, most loving, and most generous redneck family," the book stakes its claim to fame in being excessive in all that they do, good or bad—the loudest, most loving, etc.[191] Indeed, the first pages of the book feature a quote from Alana printed in a childish, oversized font, proclaiming: "I'm the queen of all!" In this way, the family repositions the very indulgences for which they are often indicted as virtuous. According to Burke:

> [T]he hierarchic principle [can be] represented in terms of the head. But particularly in a myth revealing the nature of first and last things, it can also be represented 'pastorally' by the least. Or the most efficient reduction of all would be an image containing both ideas: the sacrificial king who is, in one figure, the bleeding, victimized lamb and the victor to whom all do obeisance. Here, the same ordination is represented by bringing the highest and lowest rungs together.[192]

In other words, the principle of hierarchy is most fully realized in a discourse which inflects both ends of the order, the high and the low—and *HCHBB* does just that. While reveling in the transgression of high/low boundaries and embracing their "excesses" through symbolic inversion of dominant hierarchies, the show becomes the ultimate symbol of RTV, representing the fulfilment of the genre's possibilities and thus becoming synonymous with it. In this way, "Honey Boo Boo" really is "the queen of all," at least as far as RTV is concerned.

Structuring Hierarchies

How to Honey Boo Boo's introduction acknowledges that "When *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* premiered in 2012, everyone—critics and viewers alike—had a definite opinion about the family…Some have found *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* to be horrifying, while others can

[191] Levesque, Shannon/Thompson Family, *How to Honey Boo Boo*, xvii.
[192] Burke, *ROM*, 293.

appreciate just how much love and warmth are present in the Honey Boo Boo household."[193] While "love" and "horror" aren't exactly opposites, their opposition suggests an important dynamic at work in the show. Cavalcante (2014) argues in his reception analysis of the official HCHBB Facebook page that fan comments focus on "three dimensions: the [Shannon/]Thompson family's perceived 'realness,' its defiance of middle-class cultural sensibilities, and the performance of happiness the family expresses," elements which he finds to be reinforcing.[194] Indeed, Allen and Mendick (2013) note that "RTV invites particular viewing practices oriented around the search for the 'real' self. It focuses on 'ordinary people,' taken 'in themselves, as signs of the real.'"[195] We have already hypothesized that the sudden reemergence of the hillbilly and redneck in popular culture can be attributed, at least in part, to the economic fallout of the market recession in the late 2000's and its sluggish recovery into the 2010's.[196] Thus, the "reality" of working class poverty is certainly at play here. What Cavalcante overlooks, however, is the fact that working class authenticity in a neoliberal political economy is fraught with contradiction.

In their study of identity construction and class through study participants' discussions of RTV, Allen and Mendick (2013) point out that working class reality stars "are often positioned as 'too authentic,' unable to take up practices of self-realization and requiring transformation towards the middle-class norm, assisted by cultural intermediaries or 'experts' to become fitter, thinner, better people…Thus, for members of the working class to successfully inhabit a

[193] Levesque, Shannon/Thompson Family, *How to Honey Boo Boo*, xvii-xviii.
[194] Cavalcante, "You Better Redneckognize," 41.
[195] Allen and Mendick, 2013, quoting Biressi & Nunn (2004), pg. 461.
[196] See introduction: Bivens, Fieldhouse, & Shierholz, "Freefall to Stagnation," The Economic Policy Institute, February 14 2013, pg. 5, http://www.epi.org/publication/bp355-five-years-after-start-of-great-recession/.

neoliberal subjectivity requires that they work on themselves."[197] This is particularly true for Alana, who literally performs the ideal of middle-class beauty and charm as projected onto child beauty queens. The need to impress the competitions' judges presents a problem for Alana, who desperately wants to win the "Grand Supreme" title but lacks the social refinement necessary to do so. In the show's second episode, Momma June hires an expert in etiquette to coach both Alana and her sister Pumpkin, who Momma estimates "needs to be the more refined" out of everyone in the family. Yet as Allen and Mendick note, this very process of self-transformation presents a contradiction for working class RTV participants.[198] In transforming their identities according to a middle-class standard, members of the working class actually lose their credibility as authentic. In other words, the imperative to discover and improve one's self is a trap for families like the Shannon/Thompsons, whose only claim to authenticity is in embracing their social abjection. And perhaps this is why, after poking fun at the stern etiquette coach, the girls proceed to denigrate the very idea of propriety. It may also explain why Alana "retires" from pageants in the wake of her RTV success: her performance in one domain threatened to undermine performance in another.

What's more, Cavalcante concludes that "Facebook offers an accessible avenue for fans to 'redneckognize,' and to 'talk back' to those in the popular press and the 'haters' on Facebook who view the family as a depiction of ethical inadequacy, social decline and moral decay."[199] While acknowledging the risks of legitimizing "the social and economic status quo by showing that the economically disenfranchised are after all (mindlessly) happy in their situation," he argues that "the family nonetheless escapes pure caricature…[and] the show bears witness to

[197] Allen and Mendick, 2013, pg. 462.
[198] Allen and Mendick, 2013.
[199] Cavalcante, "You Better Redneckognize," 53.

working-class struggle and 'real' experiences of austerity."[200] Optimistically, Cavalcante concludes that thousands of Facebook posts in support of the Shannon/Thompsons show "that viewers ultimately decode the show in alternative and resistant ways…[and] are aware the show is a media representation."[201] Yet there are problems here. Let's return to the contradiction acknowledged in *How to Honey Boo Boo*'s opening pages, the opposition between "love" and "horror," two of the dominant responses to the show.

Cavalcante's reception analysis demonstrates that many fans find the "horrors" of the family's existence to be signs of the real because they identify with them, others see find the "love" and happiness that the family performs to be genuine precisely because it exists alongside working class struggles, "including but not limited to noticeable health problems, the challenges of living in a small and cramped living space, the necessity of hand-me-down clothes and dumpster diving, and a reliance on the unhealthy kinds of mass produced bulk food items that can cheaply feed a large family."[202] The first group—those who identify with the working class identity performed by the Shannon/Thompsons—often derive their "love" of the show from nostalgia for their own childhood. The second group—those who take their happiness in the face of hardship as a sign of authenticity—mostly romanticize their poverty. And both groups, despite what Cavalcante argues, legitimate the family's identity as real. The problem here is that finding reality in performances of middle-class defiance as sources of legitimate happiness does normalize poverty and legitimate working class values only in opposition to middle-class social standards and, more importantly, it draws attention away from the structural sources of that poverty or the public support which might lessen its effects on the family.

---

[200] Cavalcante, "You Better Redneckognize," 50.
[201] Ibid., 50.
[202] Ibid.

Ouellette and Hay (2008) analyze operations of self-reponsibilization in regards to health through the program *Honey We're Killing the Kids.*[203] They argue that "[t]his program teaches personal responsibility, risk-avoidance, and choice by diagnosing and rehabilitating cases of 'ignorance' and self-neglect, and allowing the television viewer at home to identify as normal in comparison."[204] While such shows "diagnose" the health problems of deviant parents who are said to be "killing" their children through exposure to unhealthy practices and environments and "rehabilitating" them through targeted interventions, HCHBB makes no such intervention. While the "diagnosis" of an unhealthy lifestyle is easy to deduce from the show's use of framing elements and the cast's floating answers to mostly unheard questions from cameramen or producers on the set, intervention is not the goal—at least not in the lives of the Shannon/Thompson family. Viewers who identify with the family's obesity, overall levels of inactivity, and appetite (or necessity) for making meals out of food that few would deem edible (let alone delectable) may find no need of intervention in either the RTV family or themselves. And while identification with the cast might generate a solidarity which negates the half-veiled criticisms evident in the show's dominant frame, it might just as easily spawn the desire for change—fueled by the knowledge that disease and death often accompany obesity or by an eruption of self-loathing, or by something else entirely. On the other hand, the desire for change in the Shannons/Thompsons is constrained by the lack of resources which is, ironically, the main focus of the show.

While Momma June and her family enact the basic tenets of neoliberal citizen ship by maximizing the resources they do have in order to meet their needs (seen through Momma's

[203] Ouellette and Hay, 2008, 478.
[204] Ouellette and Hay, 2008, 479.

habits of extreme-couponing; shopping at auctions, flea markets, and dumps; making use of local networks to collect fresh road kill for consumption; entertaining her children through free or cheap activities; etc.), they also fail to "maximize their interests" in other ways (such as health, education, style, mannerisms of speech and etiquette, legally sanctioning de-facto marriages, or seeking employment in more safe and stable environments).[205] The family's ambivalence towards long-term projects of self-improvement may be said, optimistically, to be rooted in a self-confident defiance of the norms and strictures which govern such projects. On the other hand, perhaps pessimistically, it may be understood as rooted in a lack of resources required for self-improvement, primarily a disposable income. While it may no longer be the case that the Shannons/Thompsons live in poverty, the durability of their income from the show is both uncertain and unlikely. Sue Collins (2008) explores the creation of "dispensable celebrity" in the television industry.[206] She argues that "[t]his lower stratum of celebrity value affords both surplus for cultural industries and the maintenance of the larger system of celebrity valorization."[207] Collins says that celebrity constitutes "an audience gathering mechanism whose properties as labor power and capital represent stratified value to cultural producers."[208] Not only does the frenzied production of reality celebrity reinforce the "star system" of elite celebrity, but it also precludes them from entering the exclusive realm of "real celebrity" as populated by stars who possess the "wider circulation by which to accrue sustained symbolic and economic value."[209]

---

[205] Ouellette and Hay, 2008, 476.
[206] Collins, Sue, "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity," *Television & New Media*, 03/2008, (Volume 9, Issue 2), 87 – 110.
[207] Collins, 2008, 89.
[208] Ibid., 91.
[209] Ibid., 95.

While a select few reality TV celebrities go on to achieve modest yet recurring roles in the industry and, occasionally, mega-wealth and stardom (gamedoc contestants like Carrie Underwood or the members of One Direction come to mind), the vast majority find their fame to be fleeting.[210] Moreover, Collins points out that television networks often retain contractual ownership of the "life story and public image" of their reality TV cast members.[211] "This contractual agreement underscores the enormous power differential in power relations between producer and cultural worker."[212] Interestingly, the cultivation of celebrity commodity carves out what Collins calls "celebrity place:"

> the aggregate of media space devoted to celebrity coverage by all facets of the cultural industries…[like] the seat next to Leno or Letterman, the guest appearance on Saturday Night Live, the lead to Entertainment Tonight, and the feature story of People or Entertainment Weekly that function to signify celebrity, symbolically and materially. For analytical purposes, it is the site in the singular that houses celebrity as a product in and of itself, and it is the infrastructure that gathers audiences for advertisers as it manages the production and promotion of personalities into celebrity status.[213]

Celebrity place serves as the wider frame within which to contextualize a particular celebrity outside of his or her work on reality TV. Thus, celebrity space highlights both the apparatus of celebrity production through visibility and its contradictory nature for reality TV stars. As "the site where audiences take pleasure in working through these contradictions, 'enjoying the hype,' and discovering the authentic, real identities of celebrities…[i]t is also the site of cultural

[210] Ibid., 99.
[211] Ibid., 98.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 101-102.

production in which a large share of the negotiation around celebrity's value as a product itself is conducted."[214]

Couldry argues that the economic system of neoliberalism is inherently cruel because it "requires of its participants continuous loyalty, submission to surveillance and external direction even within the deepest recesses of private life, yet demands of those same individuals an acceptance of the fragility and impermanence of the opportunities it provides."[215] These contradictions are remedied through their translation "into ritual that enacts as 'play' an acceptable version of the values and compulsions on which that cruelty depends," and what better "theater" than that of reality TV to host the dramatization of neoliberal values?[216] While Couldry's analysis hones in on the specific mechanisms by which a specific sub-genre of RTV—the gamedoc—reproduces the "common sense" of neoliberalism, his observations tend to be true for the entire genre: both the extended, 24/7, "flexible" workplace of the 21st century and the format of RTV condition the worker/audience to accept the necessity of surveillance in order to make sure that employees/RTV participants are "performing" the normative values of the institution (be it the workplace or the network, the manager or the audience member, etc.) with authenticity.[217] In other words, not only is the neoliberal worker eternally available for the work that he does, he is also subject to perpetual surveillance which ensures that he authentically enacts the values of the "system" to which he owes his mercurial means of subsistence.[218] Likewise, the RTV worker is subject to investigations of authenticity according to the norms of

[214] Ibid., 102.
[215] Nick Couldry, "Teaching Us To Fake It: The Ritualized Norms of Television's 'Reality' Games," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, (New York: New York University Press), ed. by Murray and Ouellette (2009), 3.
[216] Couldry, 2009, 3.
[217] Ibid., 9.
[218] Ibid., 3.

the dominant frame within which their RTV series is cast, but also to the audience's "negotiations of RTV authenticity."[219] Thus, Couldry aligns with Andrejevic in arguing that the forms of surveillance common to RTV formats work to normalize the surveillance of both workers and consumers in the neoliberal economy. Moreover, the "emotional labor" performed by the surveilled worker implies that success and failure belong to each individual. Whether or not a RTV worker performs authenticity authentically is often (although not always—a point to which we will return) indicated by their willingness to "inhabit a neoliberal subjectivity [which] requires that they work on themselves and move towards a set of dispositions and ways of being in the world associated with the middle class."[220] The paradox of becoming a "better" person—that is, in most cases, a better employee—while at the same time being "authentic" is thus resolved in the logic of neoliberalism, in which the project of "self-actualization" takes place in the fields of labor and consumption.

Conclusion

Burke was interested in the operation of symbolic ordering and transgression in romantic literature as "grotesque forms of social courtship. And you'd come closer to the truth if you called them remote variants of pure persuasion (like virgin-worship, or like poems proclaiming the frigidity, cruelty, aloofness, or infidelity of mistresses) than if you confined your explanation to a purely sexual source."[221] By "pure persuasion," he indicated a transcendence of the immediate symbolism of the object—(the sexual encounter, for example) to a realm of greater signification (such as the social encounter) which characterized the hierarchic motive.[222]

[219] Couldry, 2009, 3; Allen & Mendick, 2013, 472.
[220] Allen & Mendick, quoting Bordieu, 462.
[221] Burke, *ROM*, 284.
[222] Ibid.

In *HCHBB*, the immediate symbolism already indicates a transgression of social class boundaries and thus the mystery of class relations. In this way, the stereotyped representations of rednecks in the broader genre of RTV symbolize the courting of class that Burke was after. And by virtue of coming to represent the genre as the "completion" of its form, *HCHBB* symbolizes its ultimate "perfection," a symbolic inversion whereby the lowest of the low cultural forms is crowned "the queen of all" RTV.

The risk in settling for the cultural politics of identity and performance as seen through the modality of transgression in *HCHBB* is that it averts attention from "the absence of reflexive connection between the much watched surface of [Reality TV] and the intensely lived realities of the neoliberal workplace that is most notable."[223] Indeed, RTV as a genre is a "workplace" inasmuch as RTV cast members perform what Andrejevic (2004) calls "the work of being watched."[224] He points out that "[n]ot only does the monitoring process allow one to learn about oneself—to express one's unique individuality—not only does it serve as a forum for self-expression—a way to 'get one's message out to the world,' but it also provides tangible economic benefits."[225] Whereas constant surveillance holds the promise of reality, "in a teeming society wherein one's actions often go unnoticed by others, the implication is that the reality of those actions can be validated if they are recorded and broadcast—they become more real to oneself to the extent that they become real for others. Surveillance is a kind of institutionally ratified individuation: it provides the guarantee of the authenticity of one's uniqueness."[226] Yet this guarantee of "authenticity" will always be fraught in many ways for working class RTV stars,

[223] Couldry, 2009, 12.
[224] Andrejevic, 2004, 110.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

who are doubly ensnared in working-classness through their perpetuation of a stratified celebrity economy. While symbolic transgression in HCHBB provides a modality through which critics can understand the show's complex signification, it ultimately perpetuates the class divisions it mystifies, depoliticizes class identification and performance, and enacts class stratification even within the industry of celebrity production.

References

19 Kids and Counting, TLC, 2008-present.

"2013 Channel Guide Magazine Viewer Voice Award Winners," Channel Guide Magazine, October 21 2013, http://www.channelguidemagblog.com/index.php/2013/10/21/2013-channel-guide-magazine-viewers-voice-award-winners/.

Allen, Kim, and Heather Mendick . "Keeping it Real? Social Class, Young People, and Authenticity in Reality TV." *Sociology* 48, no. 4 (2012): 465.

American Hoggers, A&E, (2011-present).

American Pickers, The History Channel, (2010-present).

Andrejevic, Mark. *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Ax Men, The History Channel, (2008-present).

Backyard Oil, The Discovery Channel, (2013-present).

Bamazon, The History Channel, (2012-present).

Barnhart, Aaron, "How Reality TV Took Over Prime Time," Broadcasting & Cable, Vol. 140 Issue 36 (2010): 4.

Baudry, Jean-Louis, and Alan Williams. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." *Film Quarterly* 28.2 (1974): 39-47.

Bayou Billionaires, CMT, (2012-present).

Big Tips Texas, MTV, (2013-present).

Billy the Exterminator, A&E, (2009-2012).

Biressi, Anita, and Heather Nunn. *Reality TV: realism and revelation*. London: Wallflower Press, 2004.

Bivens, Fieldhouse, & Shierholz, "Freefall to Stagnation," The Economic Policy Institute, February 14 2013, pg. 5, http://www.epi.org/publication/bp355-five-years-after-start-of-great-recession/.

Black Gold, truTV, (2008-present).

Brouwer, Daniel C., and Robert Asen. Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010. Print.

Brouwer, Daniel, and Catherine Squires. "Public Intellectuals, Public Life, and the University." Argumentation and Advocacy (2003): 201-13. Web.

Buckwild, MTV (2013).

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Cajun Pawn Stars, The History Channel, (2012-2013).

Call of the Wildman, Animal Planet, (2011-present).

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*. 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 1974.

Carlson, Erin, "Barbara Walters Defends Honey Boo Boo 'Most Fascinating' Selection," *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 4 2012, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/barbara-walters-defends-honey-boo-397599.

Cavalcante, Andre, "You Better 'Redneckognize'!: Deploying the Discourses of Realness, Social Defiance, and Happiness to Defend Here Comes Honey Boo Boo on Facebook," in *Reality Television: Oddities of Culture*, ed. Alison F. Slade, Amber J. Narro, and Burton P. Buchanan (Lexington Books, 2014).

Cloud, Dana. "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment in The Bachelor." *Critical Studies in Media Communication 27.5* (2010): 413-37.

Collins, Sue, "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity," *Television & New Media*, 03/2008, Volume 9, Issue 2, (pg. 87 – 110).

Corner, John, "Afterword: framing the new," in *Understanding Reality Television*, edited by Holmes and Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2004).

Couldry, "Teaching Us To Fake It: The Ritualized Norms of Television's 'Reality' Games," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, (New York: New York University Press), edited by Murray and Ouellette (2009), pg. 3.

Country Fried Home Videos, CMT, (2006-present).

Deadliest Catch, The Discovery Channel, (2005-present).

Deep South Paranormal, Syfy, (2013-2014).

Deery, June, "Reality TV as Advertainment," *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, (Volume 2, Issue 1, 2004).

Dirty Jobs, (Discovery Channel, 2006-2012).

"Dirty Jobs," Wikipedia, Last Modified July 15 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_Jobs.

Donaldson James, Susan, "American Moms Reject French Effort to Ban Honey Boo Boos," *ABC News*, September 20 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/Health/american-moms-reject-french-effort-ban-honey-boo/story?id=20308890.

Dubrofsky, Rachel. "Fallen Women in Reality TV." *Feminist Media Studies* 9.3 (2009): 353-368.

Duck Dynasty, Gurney Productions, A&E, 2012-present.

Elliott, Theresa, "TV, pop culture have gone down the tubes," *Telegram & Gazette* (Massachusetts), January 27 2014.

Foss, Sonja, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, (IL: Waveland Press, 2009), pg. 137.

Gator Boys, Animal Planet, (2012-present).

Glamour Belles, Lifetime, (2011).

Grinnell, Max, "Struggle to Keep 'The Real Beverly Hillbillies' Off the Air Continues," Scout Archives, 2003, https://scout.wisc.edu/archives/r16979/struggle_to_keep_the_real_beverly_hillbillies_off_the_air_continues.

Gunn, Joshua. "The Rhetoric of Excorcism: George W. Bush and the return of Political Demonology." *Western Journal of Communication* 68 (Winter 2004): 1-23.

Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT, 1991.

Harkins, Anthony. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, (Authentic Entertainment/TLC, 2012-present), TV.

Hillbilly Blood, Destination America, (2011-present).

Hillbilly Handfishin, Animal Planet, (2011-2012).

Hollywood Hillbillies, The Reelz Channel, (2014-present).

Holmes, Su, "Reality TV and 'Ordinary' People: Re-visiting Celebrity, Performance and Authenticity," in *Trans-Reality Television: The Transgression of Reality, Genre, Holmes, Su., and Deborah Jermyn. Understanding reality television. London: Routledge, 2004.Politics and Audience*, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2010), pg. 113.

Holmes, Su., Deborah Jermyn, and Jennifer Gillian. "From Ozzie Nelosn to Ozzy Osbourne: the genesis and development of the Reality (star) sitcom." In *Understanding reality*

television. London: Routledge, 2004. 54-70.

hooks, bell. *Belonging: a culture of place*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.

Huff, R. M. *Reality Television*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006.

Hurt, Charles, "Nuclear Option: The Boo Boo of Here Comes Honey Boo Boo," *The Washington Times*, 27 August 2013, http://p.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/27/the-boo-boo-of-here-comes-honey-boo-boo/.

Ice Road Truckers, The History Channel, (2007-present).

James, Kyleen, "Redneck TV: 'Honey Boo Boo,' 'Ducky Dynasty,' and Cable's Blue Collar Boom," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 15 2013, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/redneck-tv-honey-boo-boo-408551.

James, Meg, "'Beverly Hillbillies'? CBS Has Struck Crude Oil, Appalachia Says," The Los Angeles Times, February 11 2003, http://www.commondreams.org/headlines.shtml?/headlines03/0211-03.htm.

Johnson, Zach, "Joy Behar: Honey Boo Boo Will 'Grow Up To Be A Big Fat Woman,'" Celebrity News, September 7 2012, http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/joy-behar-honey-boo-boo-will-grow-up-to-be-a-big-fat-woman-201279.

Kompare, Derek. "Extraordinarily Ordinary: The Osbournes as 'An American Family'" in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. Edited by Murray, S. and Laurie Ouellette, 97-118. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2004.

Levesque, Jennifer, and the Shannon/Thompson Family. *How to Honey Boo Boo: the complete guide on how to redneckognize the Honey Boo Boo in you*. New York: William Morrow, 2013.

Lewis, J. 2004. "The Meaning of Real Life". In *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, Edited by: Murray, S. and Laurie Ouellette, 288–302. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2004.

Lizard Lick Towing, TruTV, (2011-present).

Lowery, Annie. "The Wealth Gap in America is Growing, Too," *The New York Times*, April 2 2014, http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/the-wealth-gap-is-growing-too/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

Marikar, Sheila, "'Honey Boo Boo' Ratings Top RNC's," ABC News, August 31 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/08/honey-boo-boos-ratings-beat-out-the-rncs/.

Martin, James, *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 450.

McCann, Bryan, "Therapeutic and Material <Victim> hood: Ideology and the Struggle for Meaning in the Illinois Death Penalty Controversy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies 4*, no. 4 (2007): 383.

McCarthy, Anna, "'Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me': Postwar Social Science and the 'First Wave' of Reality TV." *Reality TV: remaking television culture* (2 ed.), edited by Murray, S., & Ouellette, L. (2009). New York: New York University Press.

Moonshiners, The Discovery Channel, (2011-present).

Mountain Monsters, Destination America, (2013-present).

Mudcats, National Geographic Channel, (2012-present).

Murray , S. 2004 "I Think We Need a Name for It." In *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, Edited by Murray, S. and Laurie Ouellette, 40-56. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2004.

Murray , S. , & Oullette , L. 2004, *Reality TV: Remaking television culture* . New York: New York University Press.

My Big Fat Redneck Wedding, Country Music Television (CMT), (2008-present).

My Big Fat Redneck Vacation, CMT (2012-2013).

My Big Redneck Family, CMT, (2014-present).

Myrtle Manor, TLC, (2013-present).

Nadis, Fred, "Citizen Funt: Surveillance as Cold War Entertainment," Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies Volume 37.2 (Fall 2007), pg. 12.

Nichols, Travis, "Shirley Temple Was Little Miss Economic Sunshine, Author Says," *The Washington Post*, April 13 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-temple-was-little-miss-economic-sunshine-author-says/2014/04/10/ec1e7772-ba75-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08_story.html.

Only in America, History Channel, (2011-2013).

Parker, Trey and Kenny Hotz, "Raising the Bar," *South Park*, (October 3, 2012; Braniff Productions/Comedy Central.), TV.

Party Down South, CMT, (2014-present).

Pit Bulls and Parolees, Animal Planet, (2009-present).

"Political Polarization in the American Public," Pew Research Center, last modified June 12 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

Pozner, Jennifer L. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley, CA: Seal, 2010.

Ramsey, Phil. "Journalism, Deliberative Democracy and Government Communication." *Javnost-The Public* 17.4 (2010): 81-96. Web.

"Reality Television," *Wikipedia*, Accessed June 15 1014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reality_television.

Redneck Island, CMT, (2012-present).

Rocket City Rednecks, National Geographic Channel, (2011-2013).

Roll, Gerry, "The Truth About 'The Real Beverly Hillbillies,'" Leadership for a Changing World, http://www.leadershipforchange.org/program/press/docs/OpEd-Roll.php.

Romano, Tricia, "'Ducky Dynasty,' 'Buckwild, 'Honey Boo Boo,' and the 99 Percent," *The Daily Beast*, December 13 2012, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/13/duck-dynasty-buckwild-honey-boo-boo-and-the-99-percent.html.

Shapiro, Michael, "The Politics of the Family," in Cultural Studies and Political Theory, edited by Jodi Dean, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 278.

Shugart, H. A. and Waggoner, C. E. 2008. *Making camp: Rhetorics of transgression in U.S. popular culture*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Skeggs, Beverley, and Helen Wood. *Reacting to reality television: performance, audience and value.* New York: Routledge, 2012.

Small Town Security, AMC, (2012-present).

Spies, Mike, "'Rednecks,' TV's Last Bastion of Prejudice," Vocativ, August 28 2013, http://www.vocativ.com/usa/uncategorized/redneck-reality-tv-fuels-americas-last-acceptable-form-of-racism/.

Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1992.

Stallybrass, P., and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Stewart, Kathleen . "Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares)." In *Cultural Studies and Political Theory,* edited by Jodi Dean. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000. 243-257.

Swamp People, The History Channel, (2010-present).

Sweet Home Alabama, CMT, (2011-present).

The Legend of Shelby the Swamp Man, The History Channel, (2013-present).

The Shed, Food Network, (2013-present).

Thompson, Alana, "What is a Door Nut?" TLC, August 22 2012.

Toddlers and Tiaras, TLC/Authentic Entertainment, (2008-2013).

Van Bauwel, Sophie and Nico Carpentier, *Trans-Reality Television: The Transgression of Reality, Genre, Politics, and Audience*, (UK: Lexington Books, 2010), pg. 26.

Weingus, Leigh, "Adam Levine Bashes 'Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,' Calls It 'Decay of Western Civilization,' *Huffpost TV*, December 3 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/03/adam-levine-bashes-here-comes-honey-boo-boo_n_2231572.html.